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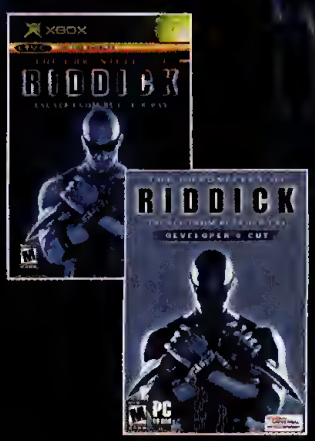
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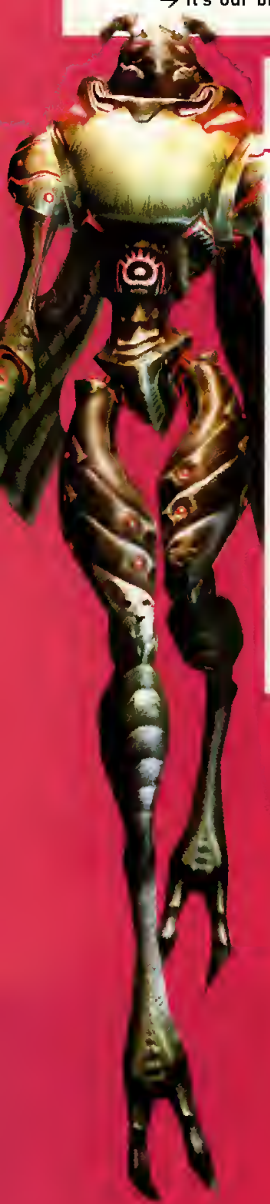
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THIS MONTH ON GMR.1UP.COM

MORE MORE MORE

Dig our interview with Alex Rigopulos from *AntiGrav* and *Karaoke Revolution* developer Harmonix? There's more where that came from. Head to GMR.1UP.com for the full transcript. While you're there, dig in to all the latest game news and previews and more reviews than you can shake a stick at. Cuz you're always shaking sticks at reviews, right?

CLUB O' THE MONTH

OLD SCHOOL GAMER

www.oldschoolgamer.1up.1UP.com

If you want to relive your Atari 2600, NES, and Intellivision days or just show off your knowledge, head here for some chat. Need a game for your N64 collection or some codes for your Dreamcast game? Hit these folks up!

BLOG MANIA

Learn the inner secrets of these *GMR* contributors on their 1UP.com blogs!



JWHDAVISON.1UP.COM

If there's something going on in the gaming world worthy of notice, chances are that our editorial director, John Davison, has written about it in his amazingly robust 1UP blog.



TOASTYFROG.1UP.COM

Not only did 1UP features editor Jeremy Parish turn out a rad Retroactive section this month, he also has a stupendous blog.

BOARDIN'

Visit http://boards.1UP.com and you can join the craziness at *GMR*'s "Nuclear War on the Dance Floor" official board. Love us or hate us, let us know—we're listening. Or at least reading. It doesn't stop there, either. There are boards for a million other topics besides *GMR*, so get your rants and raves ready and start posting.

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GMR

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO US

You hold in your hands Issue #24 of *GMR*. This means your favorite gaming magazine is heading into its "terrible twos." Yep, expect us to be cranky and poop in our pants a lot in the next year.

Just kidding. That's more like what's going to happen with Game Geezer (so what's new?). For *GMR*, as we head into our third year, it's a time to reflect on our achievements and turn our focus toward the next 50 gazillion or so issues—2005 will be a big year for *GMR* just as it will be a big year for gaming. And you, our wonderful reader, get to be a part of it all.

Speaking of 24, or actually 28: We recently received a press release from a game publisher touting its holiday lineup. Nothing unusual about that, but here's what we noticed: It listed 28 games across all platforms, 28 games we largely considered DK but nothing special.

Why does one company make 28 so-so titles, and yet it only takes one or two from Bungie, Rockstar, Valve, and Blizzard to be successful? Is it a lack of talent? Money? Dedication? Probably all of the above. Let's resolve that 2005 is the year when the only games made are great ones. And, hey, our best to you for a happy and prosperous year.

_Tom Byron, EIC



LOOKS LIKE BOND, SINGS LIKE ELVIS

GMR'S NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

It's that special time of year when the *GMR* editors look back and meditate on the year gone by, reflecting on all the mistakes they've made, all of the crappy things they've eaten, and all the naughty words they've said. It's that knowledge, that burning spark, that gives them the courage to clench their teeth...and do it all again. Only this time, harder. Who set realistic goals? Who's full of it? Read on and find out.

JAMES MIELKE - EXECUTIVE EDITOR



Plans to: Take shorter showers, put cans in their proper place, use public transportation, conserve more, waste less, and to rock the party tougher than ever. Our planet has been around for 18 gabillion years, and we've managed to cover it in tarmac, raze the forests, and exhaust its natural resources in less than a couple hundred of those. Time to dial it back a notch.

MARVIN GAYE ON THE INSIDE

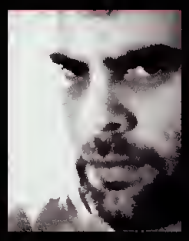
CARRIE SHEPHERD - MANAGING EDITOR



A Better Me: I resolve to make lemonade out of lemons, to see the world through rose-colored glasses, to gather rosebuds while I may, to push your buttons and rattle your cage, to get a free lunch and rake in the money, to make my bite worse than my bark, and to work smarter, not harder. Further, I resolve to make all clichés bite the dust.

VOTED FOR JOHNNY DEPP. COULDN'T HELP IT.

ANDREW PFISTER - ASSOCIATE EDITOR



I Resolve to: Visit Trinidad & Tobago. Finally release my long-awaited album *Chinese Democracy*. Adopt a highway, preferably one that's already pretty clean. *Jump up, jump up, and get down.* Make a dramatic comeback of some sort. Be "tapped to pen" or "tapped to helm" something of importance. And, you know, maybe I ought to get myself in a gym.

THE WHAMMY BAR DOESN'T CRY. IT WAILS.

CHRISTIAN NUTT - ASSOCIATE EDITOR



Bucking Tradition:
Resolutions are tricky. I'm tempted, in fact, to say "stupid." I don't want to pick out something I know I won't do but should, or something so easy I can't help but do it. There are plenty of things I want to do in 2005. But I'm just going to refuse to resolve to do anything. It beats lying!
Love, Christian

COLD ROCKING THE FUNK. ALL. NIGHT. LONG.

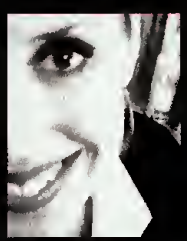
GERRY SERRANO - ART DIRECTOR



No More: crappy cheap whiskeys, sucky '80s retro bands, mystery-meat lunch specials, dry rice cakes, bad Angelina Jolie movies, and broadway musicals.
More: healthy salads, running, camping, Japanese horror movies, damn good home cooking, lots and lots of home improvements, being kind to small animals, and hip-hop music.

CAN'T WAIT FOR EMMET OTTER'S JUG-BAND CHRISTMAS RERUNS

CAROLINE KING - DESIGNER



New Year's Resolutions:
Eat less sugar. Send Mos Def that love letter I wrote. Travel more. Make more fresh CD mixes for Rico. Say the words "radical" and "hella" much more often. Make Diddle happy by starting all those bad habits. Throw away all those Brazilian-cut jeans. Make more éclairs for Cindy so she will get off my stinking back.

"I'M THE SHOT CLOCK, WAY ABOVE THE GAME"

GMR

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POST

IN WHICH WE ADMONISH OUR READERS TO LISTEN TO THEIR MOTHER, ALWAYS



→ Did you know that last issue featured 28 pages of reviews? We were sure that was the record, that is, until this issue. With some 33 pages of reviews, you're bound to find a great game that suits you, M-rated or otherwise.

GEEZER LOVE

GMR offers me something I can't get anywhere else: the Game Geezer. If you were to make a second gaming magazine, let it be *Game Geezer Wheneverly*, or *GGW* for short. It could be fully narrated by the Game Geezer himself (though you'd have to edit it a little...) and only his favorite products would be advertised. This way, the Geezer's fans, like me, are happy, and you get even more money!

_Paul M. Pasquella

We love the Geezer too. We also love money. We don't know about giving the ol' guy and his family their own magazine, but you can expect even more Geezer in the coming year. Stay tuned.

OFFENDED READER

I can't believe you gave *Leisure Suit Larry* a 5/10. It is hands down the funniest game in years. It has the ability to change what he says, amazing voice acting, and very high-resolution graphics. How could this game possibly get the same mark as "Transformers: transforming into store credit"?

The game is very offensive to some people. However, every girl over 20 I showed it to liked it more than the guys. They loved the strong female characters and even the air-headed ones. They also loved the dance contests and quarters games. If a million girls end up loving this game, what's wrong with it?

_Craig Smart

There's still plenty wrong with it (see the review, *GMR* #23), but if a million girls end up loving the game, there's definitely nothing wrong with that!

NEXUS HOAXUS

I was at the Nintendo forums, and some guy posted a picture of something called the Nintendo Nexus. Is that going to be the new Nintendo system?

_Gustavo Solis

That's actually a very nicely rendered "artist's concept" that's been floating around the Internet for about a year. The reality is that Nintendo's next-generation system, code-named "Revolution," is reportedly debuting at this May's E3 show in Los Angeles. Until then, Nintendo is keeping any information securely under wraps. And, no, the Brooklyn Bridge is not for sale and that's final!

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→ The nonexistent Nintendo Nexus.

_Anoobarak

Congratulations! You have found the true path to happiness and are sharing it with millions of your fellow readers. And, finally, the *GMR* staff knows how to get a raise: subscribe to *GMR*.

AND YOU SAY MARIO TALKS TOO MUCH?

The following is in response to the remark we made in last issue's Post regarding *Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door*: "Judging by the complete lack of feedback, we can only assume you agreed with our review 100 percent.":

The wife and I were already looking forward to *Paper Mario*, and when we got last month's issue and saw it was an Essential Selection and highly reviewed, we ran out to the store and discovered that by "Available Now" you really meant "Available" →

MESSAGE BOARD JUNKIES

G-M-R, three letters that have meant gaming goodness for two years. Many ask what these letters stand for. It's like GMR_Skip says: "We could tell you, but then we'd have to let you live a long, healthy, and productive life." Still, we got a big kick out of the various interpretations of our beloved name in the thread "Wtf is GMR?"

Not that I despise it or anything, but what the hell does it stand for?
_ArlenKels

Reminds me of how people ask how Strongbad types with gloves on.
_XenoBach

GMR is a magazine that you can get at your local EB or here online. *GMR* stands for GaMeR.
_Sciter

In the inspirational words of Milkman [from the top of the former *GMR* board], "What is *GMR*? It is *GMR*."
_LuigiSunshine

I submitted your query to http://www.acronymfinder.com/, and here's what it came up with:

Generalized Minimum Residual
German Military Representative
Ground Maintenance Response
Giant Magnetoresistive
Generic Mission Replay →

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WRITE US: GMR@ZIFFDAVIS.COM OR: GMR LETTERS
101 SECOND STREET, 8TH FLOOR, SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105



→ We think *Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door* is a better title than *Paper Mario: Shut the (bleep) Up!*

approximately two weeks from now."

Well, that's OK. What with all the recent shipping troubles and press times and all, who can keep up, right? So you're forgiven for what we are sure was an honest mistake.

Since then, both of us have been enjoying *Paper Mario* at our own pace, and here's what I feel needs to be said and was sadly omitted from your review:

Can we stop with all the dialogue and story and just play the [bleeping] game?! I have one crystal star so far and something like seven and a half hours of game time invested. After completing Chapter One, I spent roughly 45 minutes just reading stupid text balloons!

I realize that people want great gameplay and a great story, but there absolutely ought to be a way to just cut to the chase and play the damn game. As I've already said, both time and money are in short supply, and I genuinely resent having to sit there and press A for 45 minutes just to read crap I don't care about. We liked the original *Paper Mario*, so some of it's funny, but come on! If I could, I'd punch the designers in the nose and scream my war cry, "Let's play already!"

I felt the same way at the beginning of the game; there was at least 30 minutes of talking before you could do damn-near anything.

So yes, it's a great game...but can we just focus on the game and leave out some of the story in the future (or at least design a way to skip it?). That's something I'd really like to see!

Paper Mario truly is a good game, but God knows if I had known about all the talking, I might've saved my money and bought something else instead that wasn't so time intensive.

_Nullmuse

[Heavy sigh] We had to ask.

FOUR MORE YEARS

As a 13-year-old gamer, my parents don't let me get Mature-rated games. Stinks, huh? Anyway, I am angry at the fact that *Prince of Persia: Warrior Within*, the sequel to one of my favorite games ever, is going to be rated M. The first one, as we all sadly say, did not sell well, despite its brilliance. This year, Ubisoft is selling the sequel around the same time (big mistake), so the company hasn't learned. By making it M, Ubisoft probably thinks that it will appeal to a wider audience, in an effort to have it sell more this time around. So far, two other friends and I are having the same problem: We can't play this game because of its Mature rating. Not only do I think Ubisoft's plan will backfire, but now even more people will miss out on the sequel to one of the best games in a while. I know it's supposed to be a grittier, darker experience than the first one, but you don't need flying heads and blood galore to make a game great.

_Max Bassinson

We couldn't agree more with your final sentence. It's so true—blood does not make a game great, nor does it make an already great game better. We hope Ubisoft was simply matching the story's dark mood when it introduced the blood rather than cynically attempting to attract more sales. Fact is, *Warrior Within* is a fantastic game (see our review, page 110), and the blood? It's not necessary, but it's actually kind of cool.

By the way, your parents don't let you play M-rated games because they love you and want to protect you from bad things. There are plenty of great E and T games out there, just check out this month's Review section. A few words of advice: Only four more years and you can play any M game you want! Or you can find a sympathetic aunt or uncle who will secretly buy the game for you, and you can play it at their house. Um, don't tell your parents where you got this idea.

MOTHER KNOWS BEST

Why are all the good games rated M these days?! *Fable*, *Halo 2*, *Grand Theft Auto*, just to name a few—I'm missing out on all these awesome games just because they are rated M, and my mom won't let me get them! (Overlooking the fact that I don't have an Xbox anyway, I was thinking of asking for one for Christmas.) But I'm pissed off the most about not being able to get *Fable*. I have been looking forward to its release since you guys started talking about it months ago. I want it desperately! Could you guys please give me suggestions on how to talk my mom into letting me get it! (My dad's no good, he will just say, "Go ask your mother" every time.)

_Brad

Your father's playing it right: Only your mother knows what's best for you! She doesn't want you playing M-rated games? Then no playing M-rated games! Besides, you're totally →

You see, *GMR* is a concrete idea that is loosely defined by various laws and social norms. It's specific, but at the same time generalized. Its meaning is shrouded in a veil of secrecy that only people with a low-level security clearance can access. It's like tantamount, only with more para. Hope that clears everything up.
_Tanooki

GMR? It's 3 sylabols. You failed english, didn't you?
_Bad81

GMR is an abstraction, see. G could be some sort of wheelchair. M can be a pair of **bleep** or mountains, I'm guessing, and R could be ,umm, the letter P with a walking stick...I don't know.
_foulwing

GMR is that feeling you get when you're in love.
_ViewtifulSean

It's a "cool" abbreviation for Gamers, or Gamer. It also might be Get More from youR games.
_NeoMaximum

What does it matter what it stands for? It's still a great magazine.
_Never Enough Oysters

The greatest damn magazine you've ever read, bi@tch!
_NINTENDOFreak45 ←

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PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

XBOX

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→ *Need for Speed Underground 2*: One of hundreds of games that shatter the "it must be M-rated to be great" myth.

wrong: There are plenty of great games that aren't M rated: *Pikmin 2* on GameCube, *Need for Speed Underground 2*, and *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal* for the PS2, practically anything for the GBA SP, and don't forget the Nintendo DS. These are just the tip of the gaming iceberg that awaits you.

You really want an Xbox for Xmas (get it)? Then how about you stop whining and maybe help around the house more? Get better grades, perhaps even read a book. Show your mother you are a good kid. Good things happen to good kids. Of course, if that doesn't work, see the previous letter for a possible idea.

I LOVE YOU, BUT. . .

Your magazine is cool. The reviews are good, but...

1) In the November 2004 issue (#22), there were 85 pages of ads and 74 pages of reviews, charts, etc. When I get your magazine, I feel like I just bought an ad book. I have to swim through ads to get to the articles. If you absolutely must have so many ads, don't split the articles. There were nine pages of ads among the *Halo 2* article. It is ridiculous.

2) In an older issue (can't remember which one), you had a grotesque image of someone's head exploding. Come on, people, this should be common sense! Some people get very offended when blood and gore is willingly introduced like that. I mean, that wasn't even necessary! Use your brain.

3) Back to the November 2004 issue, you had three ads that were very inappropriate: *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude*, *Playboy: The Mansion*, and *Rumble Roses*. I nearly got my magazine confiscated for the day when I took it to school to read. My teacher just happened to come by as I was flipping past the *Playboy* ad. It took quite some convincing for my teacher to calm down. Stuff like that shouldn't be in there, plain and simple.

Your reviews are great, but most of these things could be solved just by using some common sense! So what? Turn down three ads. I just want to see some common sense introduced into this magazine.

_Matthew

1) Wait! There were really that many ads? Wow. *GMR* must be doing well!

2) Excuse us, but that wasn't just "someone's head," that was Tom Byron's head. We assure you that no one was hurt in that stunt. Except for Tom.

3) Well, we editors have no control over which ads appear in our magazine, but we can let our sales department know of your discomfort. While *GMR* reserves the right to deny ads it finds inappropriate, we're pretty sure one of the reasons these more adult-oriented ads show up is because *GMR*'s average reader is 24 years old.



→ Here's what Matthew's talking about. Eww, gross.

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Touching is good.



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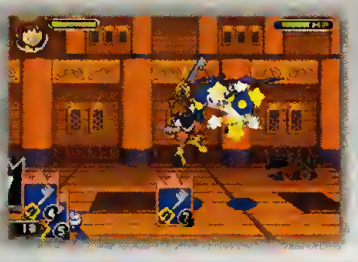
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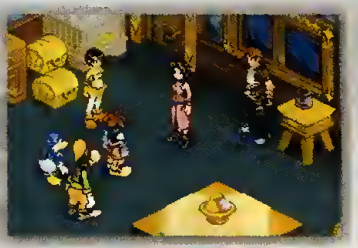
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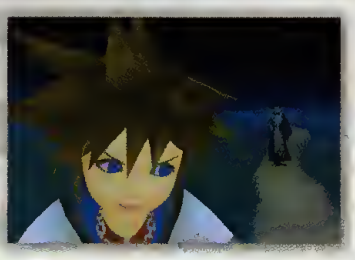












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Pirates attack the biggest and best

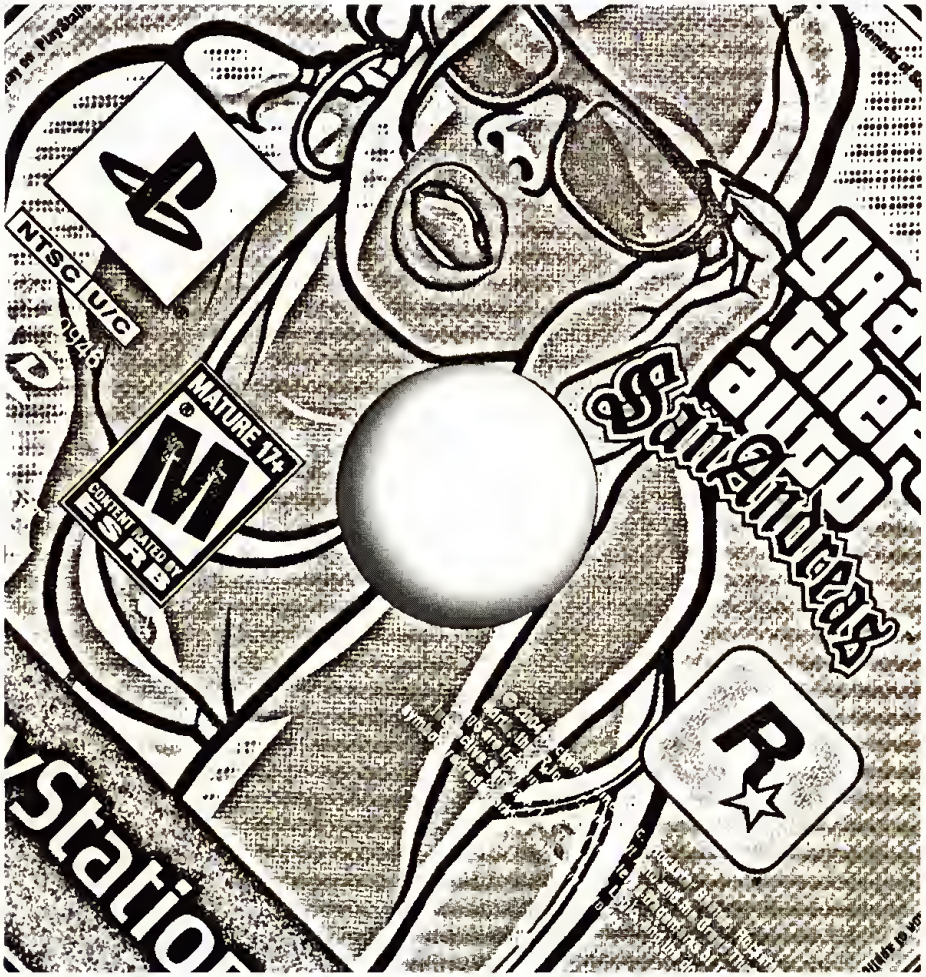
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The man behind *Karaoke Revolution* and *AntiGrav* speaks

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One of the minds behind *Halo* is back with a very different game





OLD-SCHOOL PIRATES

Nintendo's fight against piracy is deeply different from that of its competition. Since GameCube discs can't easily be copied by PCs, barely anyone tries. Instead, it's Nintendo's legacy as a console manufacturer that's offering up opportunities for lawbreakers.

If you've been to the mall in the past year or two, you've probably seen them: units that look like Nintendo 64 controllers loaded with NES games. Similar to the "TV Games" systems that contain Atari and Namco classics, these systems are full of games such as *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario Bros.*

Problem: Unlike the popular TV Games systems, these are total bootleg crap. Thanks to tips from Nintendo's fans—more than 400, in fact—the company is taking some of those responsible for bringing them into the United States to court. According to a release, "Nintendo is supporting numerous federal criminal investigations, and U.S. Customs has seized tens of thousands of the infringing devices upon their entry into the country." As far as the NES is concerned, pirates' days are numbered.



HALO 2, SAN ANDREAS JACKED

PIRACY GOES HUGE—WHAT WILL THE FUTURE HOLD?

U.S.A.

Piracy is becoming a bigger and bigger problem for game companies. While it's true that console modifications are required to play pirated software and that it's hard to come by copied games, the Internet solves both of these problems for those willing to put effort into it. Mail-order shops provide mods, and high-speed access gets pirates games increasingly quickly.

Weeks before its release, the French edition of *Halo 2* was leaked onto the Web. Many eager gamers around the world took the plunge. But what's more interesting is that Microsoft U.S. was harmed by an action that started in Europe—something that would not have been likely before the advent of the Internet.

A week or so after *Halo 2* hit the Net, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*—complete with scans of its case and manual—was also leaked. Smaller companies can fall victim, too. Atlus' *Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne* appeared for download a month before it showed up in shops.

But just as guys on the Internet like to steal games, other guys like to help track down the culprits. When *Half-Life 2* was ganked last year, most gamers were shocked. But according to developer Valve's CEO Gabe Newell, "Within a few days of the announcement of the break-in, the online gaming community had tracked down those involved." Tips from fans also helped Nintendo in its fight against piracy (see sidebar).

As we move toward an increasingly digital future, both pirates and companies will fight harder. Read between the lines: "Microsoft is committed to continuously bolstering its anticounterfeiting technical measures to ensure Xbox remains an attractive platform for game developers," says an MS spokesperson.

The next Xbox, as well as other future systems, will take antipiracy to new levels. PC gamers are already victims of increasingly invasive antipiracy measures, sometimes so volatile they destroy data or permanently harm PCs.

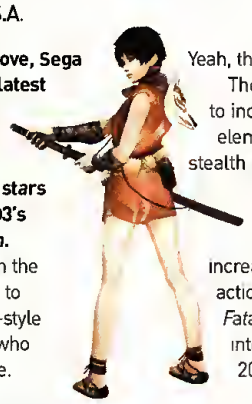
Will it ever get that bad on consoles? It seems unlikely. Ease of use is one of the biggest draws PS2, Xbox, and GameCube have over PCs. But it's clear that as gamers, we'll be caught in the middle of an increasingly bitter battle between thieves and corporations.

TENCHU RETURNS

LOVELY LADY NINJAS ON PS2

U.S.A.

In a surprise move, Sega is bringing the latest entry in the *Tenchu* series, *Fatal Shadows*, to the United States for PS2. *Fatal Shadows* stars Ayame, heroine of 2003's *Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven*.



She joins forces with the sexy Rin, pictured here, to exact some more ninja-style revenge on the people who slaughtered their village.

Yeah, the usual ninja stuff. The gameplay is expanded to include more sneaky elements, including all-new stealth kills, hiding bodies, and the ability to submerge yourself in water—along with an increased focus on solid action gameplay. *Tenchu: Fatal Shadows* will sneak into stores in February 2005.

DEMON ATTACK

CONSTANTINE ROCKS CONSOLES

U.S.A.

***Constantine* is one of those rare movie licenses that might actually make a better game than it does a film. Sure, demons are scary in a movie, but actually shooting them in the face with a machine gun (one that spits out nails from crucifixion victims, no less) is much more rewarding.**





Taking place in gritty Los Angeles (and its diabolical mirror, complete with flaming palm trees), *Constantine* could be called *Max Payne Goes to Hell*. Not fair, because it's an accurate representation of the film—but it makes a great reference point. Look for *Constantine* in February, right around when the movie comes out, and be pleasantly surprised.



GAMEPORT VITAL GAME INFO. NOW BOARDING...

ARRIVALS COMING SOON

SYSTEM	ETA	TITLE	HOW HOT?
PC/XB	DEC	**STAR WARS KDTDR II: THE SITH LORDS** The last big RPG of the year is a *very* big one	5
XB	DEC	**MECHASSAULT 2: LONE WDLF** The wreckage will be strewn across an entire galaxy	3
GBA	DEC	**MARID PARTY ADVANCE** Find some friends with GBAs, because it's time to party	3
PS2	JAN	**SUIKDDEN IV** The series heads back to its roots.	3
PC	JAN	**CITY DF VILLAINS** Be evil for $10 a month	4
PS2/XB	JAN	**MERCENARIES** Blowing up North Korea real good	3
PS2	JAN	**FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST AND THE BROKEN ANGEL** Should fill that *Kingdom Hearts* void, at least slightly	3
PS2	JAN	**THE GETAWAY: BLACK MONDAY** Foul-mouthed Brits part two	4
PC/PS2/XB	JAN	**PLAYBDY: THE MANSIDN** It's like *The Sims: Adult Edition*	4
PS2/XB	JAN	**MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITIDN** You'll be done with *Underground 2* by then, probably	4
XB	JAN	**DDDWDRLD STRANGER** Too weird to describe in one little line	5
GC	JAN	**RESIDENT EVIL 4** Forget the second movie, rock the game	5
GBA	JAN	**THE LEGEND DF ZELDA: THE MINISH CAP** Start the year off with Link's latest	5
PS2	FEB	**XENOSAGA EPISODE II** Curvaceous ladies engage in battle and philosophy	4
PS2	FEB	**TEKKEN 5** Speedy delivery of punchy and kicky	4
PC/PS2/XB	FEB	**PRDJECT: SNOWBLIND** Ex-*Deus Ex*	4

DEPARTURES OUT NOW

SYSTEM	TITLE	GMR SCORE
GC/PS2/XB	**NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGRDUND 2** Who wets down all of those streets, anyway?	9/10
PS2	**RATCHET & CLANK: UP YDUR ARSENAL** We knew he'd grow up to be a fine yellow thing.	10/10
GBA	**BDKTAI 2: SDLAR BDY DJANGD** Get outside—it's worth it.	9/10
PC	**CALL DF DUTY: UNITED DFFENSIVE** More Nazis than you can shake a stick at. Well, not actually.	8/10
PS2/XB	**THE BARD'S TALE** So, what did that dude do between *Princess Bride* and now?	7/10
PS2/XB	**MDRTAL KDMBAT: DECEPTION** Imagine Sub-Zero's dry-cleaning bills.	8/10
PS2	**KARADKE REVOLUTION VDL. 3** Real men sing duets.	9/10
GC/PS2/XB	**X-MEN LEGENDS** Comic fans get something to crow about.	8/10
PC	**THE SIMS 2** Now with 3D pee.	10/10
PC/PS2/XB	**LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE** Polygonal shenanigans of middling quality.	5/10
XB	**OUTRUN 2** *Daaaaaaytooooonaaaaaa!* Whoops, wrong game. Mostly.	7/10
PS2	**JAK 3** Mr. Bad Attitude ranks third behind Ratchet and Sly.	8/10
PS2	**GHOST IN THE SHELL: STAND ALDNE COMPLEX** If you know who Major Kusanagi is, it's probably worth a rental.	7/10
PS2	**NEO CONTRA** Not quite as "neo" as we'd hoped, but still solid.	7/10
PC	**ROME: TDTAL WAR** Get your war on.	9/10
PS2	**TAIKD: DRUM MASTER** Too cute and too much fun.	8/10

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[SCREEN]

STAR WARS TRILOGY

THE FORCE, FINALLY, IS WITH US

Much has been made of *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace* and, subsequently, *The Clone Wars* having lost the plot of the first three films in the series. Are these recent additions to the story truly bad—and more important—were we too young and naive to know good filmmaking when we saw the first three films back in the '70s and '80s? An extensive review of the early vanguard, newly released as the *Star Wars Trilogy*, reveals just how great they truly are.

Although images of Jar Jar (along with the wooden acting of Hayden Christensen, Natalie Portman, and even the usually reliable Samuel L. Jackson) may taint your vision, even these modern-day atrocities can do little to tarnish the original gems. Perhaps we expected too much out of *The Phantom Menace*, having grown accustomed to MTV-style editing, Tarantino-esque montages, and the cutting-edge cinematography of David Fincher. Watching *The Empire Strikes Back*—and even the Ewok-filled *Return of the Jedi*—again now more clearly shows that George Lucas is a storyteller in the classic mold. While the cast of the series probably had little idea of the impact the movies would have, these films are more than just simple science fiction tales.

Much has been made of Lucas' borrowings from cinematic classics like *The Hidden Fortress*, but most of us were blissfully unaware of that when we first watched these films. Watching *Star Wars* was like watching magic onscreen.

Unfortunately, this feeling diminished with every blockbuster that followed the trilogy. *The Lord of the Rings* series comes close to capturing the same sense of awe and wonder, but those highly polished affairs lack the engaging naivete that's possible when a medium is in its technological infancy. Surprisingly, for movies more than a quarter century old, the original *Star Wars* trilogy holds up extremely well, with scenes of the Death Star and intergalactic and ground-based battles a nearly complete exercise in the suspension of disbelief.

But the movies don't succeed because the lightsabers look convincing. The trilogy stands up because the storytelling is vibrant, the plot deep and layered, and because—despite the deluge of sci-fi sights and sounds—*Star Wars* exudes a Zen that movies like *The Matrix* only wish they had. The scene of young Luke Skywalker suffering in the marshes of the Dagobah system, a grouchy Yoda strapped to his back, puts the young-student-becomes-master concept onscreen better than any kung fu movie before or after. The plot nuances are detailed, the acting, to be fair, seems plucked from the golden age of cinema, with Harrison Ford that generation's Clark Gable. Compare *Star Wars*, *Empire*, or even *Return of the Jedi* to any classic fantasy, such as *The Wizard of Oz*, and you'll find they make great company.





→ Sexy Leia: every fanboy's dream. You've already bought this, haven't you?

The three films have been restored and cleaned up for the digital generation, meaning the picture and sound quality are top-notch, as can be expected from Lucasfilm. The versions presented here are based on the special editions that made their way back into theaters in the late '90s, presenting George Lucas' vision as he intended (with added scenes fitted in, complete with less-than-spectacular CG animation). Unfortunately, this means that die-hard fans won't be able to see the original versions of the films released from 1977 to 1983, warts and all. You'd think DVDs would be able to hold both versions of each film, much in the way Steven Spielberg offered consumers both takes on *E.T.*, but such is not the case. In the case of the trilogy, history rewrites itself.

Thankfully, the extra disc that rounds out this set is filled with an exhaustive look at the making of the trilogy and includes a preview of *Episode III*. Theatrical trailers, TV spots, unseen footage, and other material flesh out this digital slab of fan service. Presented in both widescreen and pan-and-scan versions (sold separately), *Star Wars Trilogy* boasts Dolby 5.1 Surround EX sound (and, of course, John Williams' triumphant soundtrack). So, after years of speculation, the legendary trilogy comes home at last, worth the price of admission and demanding a place in every video library.

PLAYSTATION
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JOHN DAVISON

RESIDENT

At last, Capcom gains some sense and finally stops messing around with *Resident Evil* on GameCube, electing to bring it to PS2.

"We will strive for developing *Resident Evil 4* to feature of each characteristic of the console platforms," the announcement from Capcom's Japanese headquarters reads with spectacularly badly translated flair. Yeah, the "characteristic" of the PS2 is that it actually has a big enough audience to *make the game a hit*.

Ouch. Sorry, N-fans, but let's call a spade a spade here, the *Resident Evil* franchise as a whole isn't exactly having a great time, and the GameCube is squarely to blame for that.

REO looked very nice, but did it make anyone's "best of" lists, aside from "best *Resident Evil* game released on GameCube since the last one"? No. Had the franchise stayed on PlayStation rather than hopping from failed platform to failed platform, perhaps it would be in better shape today.

On top of all this, the recent movie was a complete disaster, too. It cost $50 million to make and barely grossed that worldwide.

So yes, Capcom, it is time to bring *Resident Evil* back to where it belongs, and then, perhaps, you should put it back in the box and leave it alone for a while

John Davison is editor-in-chief of the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine.

[BLIPS]

Evil moves back in

Capcom announced that *Resident Evil 4*, long promised to be a GameCube exclusive, will come to PS2. That doesn't mean you should skip the GC version, though, it hits in January, but the PS2 edition will come much later in the year.

Lionhead: death and rebirth

***BC*, the second Xbox game from Lionhead Studios—of *Fable* fame—has become extinct.** The caveman sim had been planned since 2001. In cheerier news, the developer has acquired $12.7 million in funds to continue development on its other projects.



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MARK MACDONALD

DS COMETH

The Nintendo DS is finally here. Now what? Here come some tips to get you deep into this exciting new handheld:

• **SELL YOUR GBA.** The DS can play all Advance games, plus it has a much better screen that offers brighter color than the GBA SP does. Get some cash for your old portable before the market is flooded with used GBAs and its value plummets.

• **CHOOSE CAREFULLY.** Honestly, the only truly safe bet as far as I'm concerned is *Mario 64 DS*. If you really want a second game (or are forced to buy one in a bundle), I recommend the stylish and simple minigames of *Feel the Magic: XY/XX*. Otherwise, wait for the reviews.

• **HOLD IT RIGHT.** Now I know what you're saying: "What do I look like, an idiot? I can hold a handheld!" But trust me, the DS can be a handful. I didn't realize the best way to handle it until a developer passed along his method: Slip the pinkie of your writing hand (holding the stylus) under the corner of the DS, gripping normally with your other hand. See? Stable and comfortable.

• **IT'S JAPAN READY.** In general, you should wait for U.S. releases. But Nintendo handhelds are always cross-compatible, and the next batch of games—including the new *WarioWare*—hits Japan on December 2.

Mark MacDonald is executive editor of Electronic Gaming Monthly.

[TALENT]

ALEX RIGOPULOS

HARMONIX'S COFOUNDER SPEAKS

Sony has released its most fully fleshed-out EyeToy game yet: *AntiGrav*, a hoverboard racer you control with your body. It's reviewed on page 122, but we figured innovation is worth a deeper look, so we chatted with developer Alex Rigopulos.

GMR: What's up with *AntiGrav*?

AR: Sony essentially offered us a blank slate and challenged us to come up with an entirely new game concept. Eventually we were struck by a concept that we all quickly recognized as really quite compelling: letting the player use his body to control a 3D game character.

GMR: Where do you think the EyeToy can go from here?

AR: I hope we'll start to see people experiment with totally different ideas for the camera as well.... There are a lot of really far-out game ideas lurking here, and I'm hopeful the game-development community will take advantage of a great opportunity to try something different for a change.

GMR: What sets Harmonix apart?

AR: The desire to innovate is a big part of what drives the team. And philosophically, we also want to create games that fundamentally evoke a sensation of *joy* from our players, which is why we've steered clear of combat elements. With the EyeToy, though, we saw an incredible opportunity to help create a new genre of gaming that would literally get people's bodies moving and their blood flowing.

GMR: What do you think is right about games these days? What's wrong?

AR: Every year I go to E3, and almost all of the games on the show floor are, at their core, the same games that were there the year before and the year before that. There are always a few exceptions, thank God, but very few. This bores me to death. I love games, I have money to spend on games, I'm *dying* to spend money on games...I'm lucky to find one or two games that really excite me. This is a travesty, considering the incredible creative horsepower of the game-development community.

GMR: Where do you think games should be headed as a medium?

AR: Currently, I think we're trapped in a rut of creative stagnation, and if we don't find a way out of it, it's eventually going to hurt our industry, because a lot of gamers are, I believe, slowly growing fatigued by the repetition. If we don't invent new ways to entertain our audience, then eventually they'll grow bored and start finding more interesting places to spend their time.

GMR: What other creators inspire you?

AR: Masaya Matsuura's games [*PaRappa the Rapper*] have been an inspiration to Harmonix for many years, and in fact, we've talked with him off and on about a collaboration of some kind. More recently, when I played *Katamari Damacy* earlier this year, it absolutely BLEW MY MIND. I'm dying to track down Keita Takahashi and thank him.

GMR: What about the next generation?

AR: I expect that the transition from the PS2 to the next generation has much bigger implications for gaming than the transition from the PS1 to the PS2 did. Next-generation systems [are] going to provide such a quantum leap.... Of course, the graphics will be gorgeous, but more importantly, big advances in things like physics systems and A.I. depth will make the game worlds a heck of a lot more "real." I'm really looking forward to it.



→ Alex reflects on Harmonix's success

XBOX
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GREG ORLANDO

BARE RARE

Microsoft moved the moon and shifted the stars when it reached into its pocket and snatched English developer Rare for a reported $375 million.

This partnership significantly broadens our already outstanding portfolio of games that will be available for Xbox," Robbie Bach, Microsoft's chief Xbox officer, told the press.

When Microsoft acquired Rare in September 2002, its Xbox was like some headless horseman galloping madly. Save for *Halo*, Xbox lacked must-have titles. Live had yet to launch. Rare, maker of such beloved titles as *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark*, was the rider in shiny polished armor Microsoft needed, and boy did its head know where its body was going.

More than two years later, Microsoft's library has blossomed, its online service has caught fire, and Rare? Rare has been a nonfactor. Its sole Xbox offering, *Grabbed by the Ghoulies*, is best ignored. Worse, the company has taken two-plus years to birth *Conker: Live & Uncut*, a souped-up version of a Nintendo 64 game. Oh, and its goofy monster game *Kameo*? Microsoft recently confirmed its suspicious indefinite delay.

Someone laughed himself to the bank here. And it's not Microsoft.

Greg Orlando is an editor at Xbox Nation.

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PC KNOWLEDGE
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JEFF GREEN

WAR

As I write this, both *EverQuest II* and *World of WarCraft* are poised to ship, and that's great news. I've played both games and have found many things to admire in each—which is my politically correct, spineless way of saying that I am not publicly ready to declare a winner yet.

But the rivalry between Sony and Blizzard recently manifested itself in a spectacularly goofy fashion at my day job over at *Computer Gaming World* magazine. We ran a cover story in December on *EverQuest II*. It was a fine story, I say so because I wrote it.

But right in the middle of that story? A two-page ad for *World of WarCraft* with a nice big line reading, "No, I'd rather kill rats." Now, that wasn't *necessarily* referring to *EQ*—but, of course, Sony Online took it that way and was angry. Why did we put an ad slamming its game in our cover story?

The answer is that we didn't. Editors don't decide where the ads run. Nor would I be so stupid as to insult my own cover story. It was just one of those things.

The point is, with all those monthly fees to rake in, these companies are desperate to win the MMORPG war. And the great thing for PC gamers is that to win that war, they've *both* had to make good games. Competition: It's a good thing.

Jeff Green is editor-in-chief of Computer Gaming World.

GMR CHARTS

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TOP-SELLING GAMES FOR EVERY SYSTEM FOR OCTOBER '04

TOP 10 ALL FORMATS

RANK	TITLE	FORMAT	SCORE
01	**GTA: SAN ANDREAS** Gee. And we thought nobody was going to buy this.	PS2	9
02	**NBA LIVE 2005** B-ball replaces F-ball.	PS2	8
03	**TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2** Six games and going strong. Is Tony immortal?	PS2	9
04	**ESPN NBA 2K5** The price—and quality—make it hard to resist.	PS2	8
05	**STAR WARS GALAXIES: JUMP TO LIGHTSPEED** A universe of dancing Wookiees awaits.	PC	TBD
06	**PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND-YEAR DOOR** Get flat and game on.	GC	9
07	**MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION** Showering your PS2 in gory chunks.	PS2	8
08	**ESPN NBA 2K5** On Xbox, *ESPN* rules.	XB	8
09	**MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION** Xbox Live is suddenly filled with gurgling, squishy sounds.	XB	8
10	**X-MEN LEGENDS** Mutants swarm onto PS2.	PS2	8

PS2 TOP 10

		SCORE
01	GTA: SAN ANDREAS	9
02	NBA LIVE 2005	8
03	TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2	9
04	ESPN NBA 2K5	8
05	MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION	8
06	X-MEN LEGENDS	8
07	LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE	5
08	FIFA SOCCER 2005	7
09	ACE COMBAT 5: THE UNSUNG WAR	8
10	STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT	8

XBOX TOP 10

		SCORE
01	ESPN NBA 2K5	8
02	MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION	8
03	NBA LIVE 2005	8
04	X-MEN LEGENDS	8
05	TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2	9
06	KINGDOM UNDER FIRE: THE CRUSADERS	8
07	DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE	9
08	LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE	5
09	STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT	8
10	FABLE	8

PC TOP 10

		SCORE
01	STAR WARS GALAXIES: JUMP TO LIGHTSPEED	TBD
02	LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE	5
03	ROME: TOTAL WAR	9
04	ULTIMA ONLINE: SAMURAI EMPIRE	NR
05	THE SIMS 2	10
06	CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE	8
07	CALL OF DUTY	7
08	TRIBES: VENGEANCE	7
09	WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR	8
10	ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3	TBD

GBA TOP 10

		SCORE
01	POKÉMON FIRERED	8
02	POKÉMON LEAFGREEN	8
03	MARIO PINBALL LAND	5
04	KIRBY & THE AMAZING MIRROR	7
05	DRAGON BALL Z: BUU'S FURY	NR
06	MEGA MAN ZERO 3	6
07	SHARK TALE	NR
08	SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3	9
09	SUPER MARIO BROS.	NR
10	ZELDA II: THE ADVENTURE OF LINK	NR

GC TOP 10

		SCORE
01	PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND-YEAR DOOR	9
02	X-MEN LEGENDS	8
03	DONKEY KONGA	7
04	TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2	9
05	NBA LIVE 2005	8
06	MIDWAY ARCADE TREASURES 2	6
07	FIFA SOCCER 2005	7
08	WWE DAY OF RECKONING	NR
09	PIKMIN 2	8
10	ZOIDS: BATTLE LEGENDS	NR



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WHAT'S HOT? GMR PRESENTS EB GAMES' BEST DEALS

TOP 5 PRE-ORDERS

RANK	TITLE	FORMAT
01	STAR WARS KOTOR II: THE SITH LORDS	PC/XB
02	RESIDENT EVIL 4 Exclusive making-of DVD	GC
03	GUILD WARS Bonus disc including special in-game item	PC
04	MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION	PS2/XB
05	TEKKEN 5	PS2

CURRENT PRE-ORDER DEALS

TITLE	FORMAT	DATE
LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH Bonus CD	PC	12/06
MECHASSAULT 2: LONE WOLF LIMITED EDITION Xbox Live Arcade bonus disc	XB	12/28
PLAYBOY: THE MANSION Mini *Playboy* swimsuit calendar	PC/PS2/XB	01/11
RESIDENT EVIL 4 Exclusive making-of DVD	GC	01/11
GUILD WARS Bonus disc including special in-game item	PC	02/01

Get cool stuff with your games, while supplies last.

RISE FROM YOUR GRAVE

STUBBS THE ZOMBIE CONVERTS GAMERS

U.S.A.

What do you do when you have access to the technology behind *Halo*? If you're Alex Seropian—who left Bungie, *Halo*'s developer, to found his own company—you devise a profoundly different idea and set about making your own game.

Wideload Studios, Seropian's start-up, is currently hard at work on *Stubbs the Zombie*, which features a left-of-center story with a *Simpsons*-like sense of humor. This, of course, is complemented by the solid gameplay provided by the *Halo* tech.

As Stubbs, you awaken in the '50s future-city of Punchbowl, Pennsylvania, during its opening ceremonies. This gleaming metropolis, of course, will soon be riddled with bullet holes and crawling with the walking undead.

You can bite or bomb enemies to turn them into your minions ..and they'll go find more prey, resulting in an ever-increasing swarm of zombies. Meanwhile, you can possess a cop with your detachable hand and go on a shooting spree. The gritty, gory action is punctuated by genuinely funny cut-scenes. Whatever else *Stubbs* may be, it's not typical. Look for it on Xbox, PC, and Mac next summer.







→ Need to break out of jail? No problem: Just start biting the other prisoners. They'll turn into zombies and start attacking other prisoners, who turn into zombies...piece of cake.





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GAMEPLANNER | DECEMBER 2004

ALL RELEASE DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. SO IT'S NOT OUR FAULT!

AFTER NOVEMBER, THIS SEEMS LIKE BARELY ANY GAMES

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THUASDAY	FAIDAY	SATUADAY
			01 The month in releases begins with *ChoroQ* (PS2), *Kuon* (PS2), *GunGriffon: Allied Strike* (XB), and *Blitzkrieg: Rolling Thunder* (PC), which has no relation to the old arcade game.	02	03 Two movies to go see. *Ocean's Twelve* (how clever!) and the latest with everyone's fave non-Belmont vampire slayer, *Blade Trinity*	04
05	06 *Battle Assault 3 Featuring Gundam Seed* (PS2), *Prince of Persia: Warrior Within* (GC/PC/PS2/XB), *Star Wars KOTOR II: The Sith Lords* (PC/XB), *Mario Party 6* (GC), and *LOTR: The Battle for Middle-earth* (PC) arrive.	07 Hanukkah begins tonight, so buy *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories* (GBA), *Mega Man X8* (PS2), *Viewtiful Joe 2* (GC/PS2), or *Dark Age of Camelot: Catacombs* (PC). Well, it sounds good to us. ..	08 	09 	10 	11
12	13	14 Burn rubber to pick up your copy of *Gran Turismo 4* (PS2).	15 	16 	17 The film *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events* hits. The original books are by San Francisican Daniel Handler, so we had to give a shout out.	18 
19 	20	21	22 *NFL Street 2* (GC/PS2/XB) should prove popular today.	23	24 It's Christmas Eve, of course	25 And today is Christmas. Unwrap some games.
26 Kwanzaa begins today, bringing the holiday season to a close, more or less.	27	28 *MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf* (XB) and *Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2* (GC) show up just in time to be bought with gift cards.	29	30	31	

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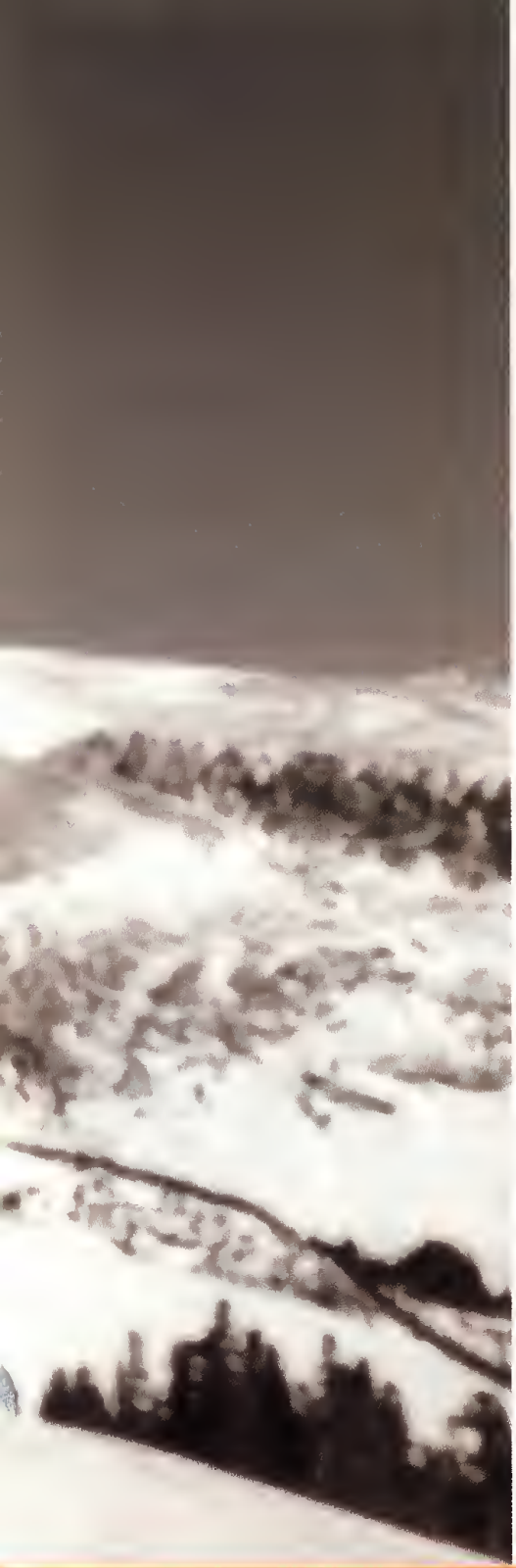
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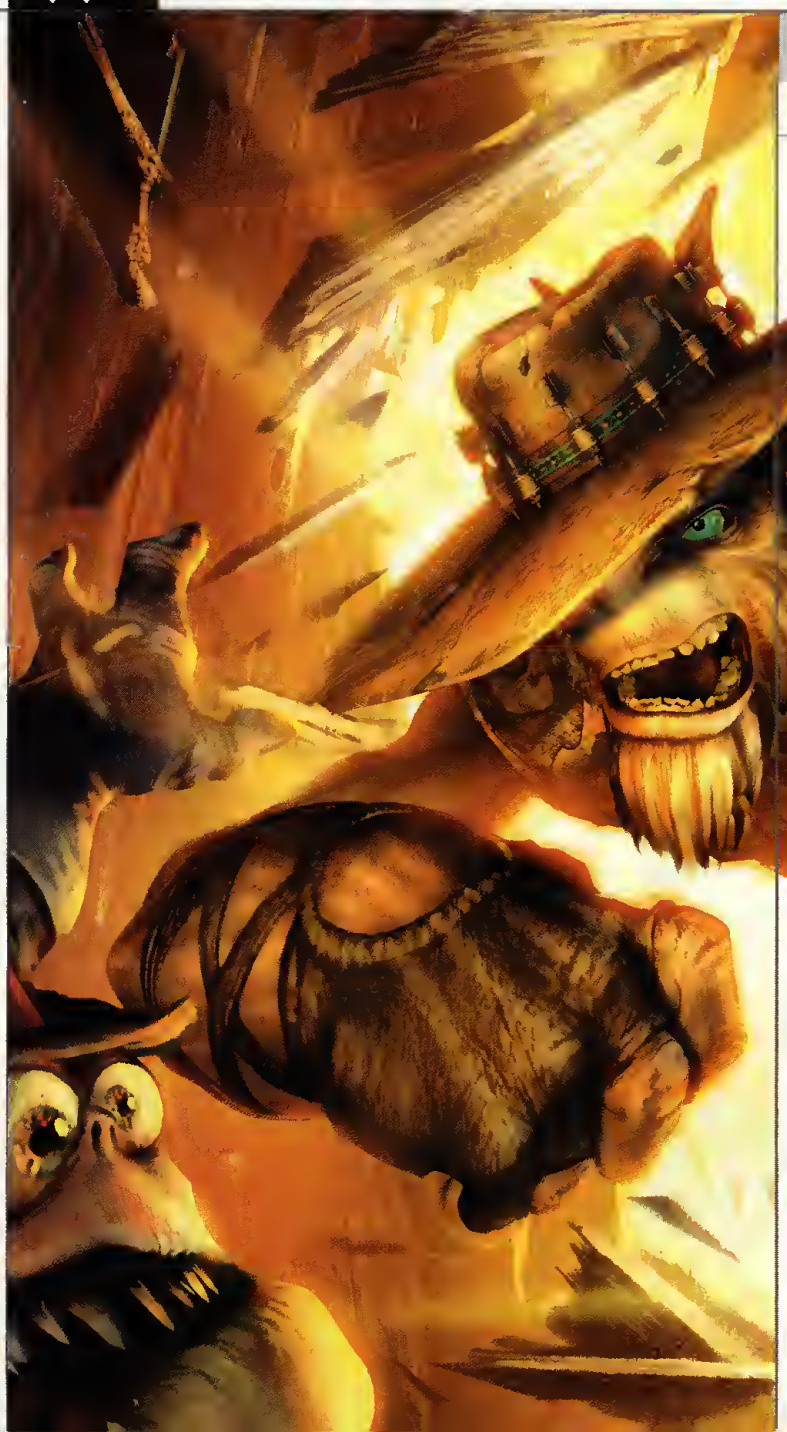
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WARNING! HAZARDOUS MATERIAL

Here at *GMR*, we preview games a little differently. To ensure that our previews are as relevant as possible, we feature only titles that will be released within six months. We also record our level of excitement about each game with cool little flames. Previews are not reviews—they're merely a guide as to how good a game in progress is looking. They're snapshots. If we're not very excited about a game, it gets one or two flames. If we're taking a wait-and-see attitude, expect to see three flames. Over and above that, you can bet we're pretty excited. It's our duty to tell you what we think at every stage of a game's development cycle—positive, negative, or somewhere in between.



INCOMING GAMES PREVIEWED

PREVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

BROTHERS IN ARMS	PC/PS2/XB	052
CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH: RETURN TO ARMS	PS2	054
FINAL FANTASY VII: DIRGE OF CERBERUS	PS2	060
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RELEASE | JANUARY

ODDWORLD STRANGER

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS JUST GOT...WELL, STRANGER

☐SYSTEM XB ☐PUBLISHER EA GAMES ☐DEVELOPER ODDWORLD INHABITANTS



The wild and weird realm of Oddworld has been closed to the public ever since 2001's *Munch's Oddysee* delivered its zany, off-kilter platforming charms to the Xbox launch lineup. And although Munch's adventure represented only the second of five planned games in creator Lorne Lanning's overall epic narrative, he's not currently interested in creating the last three volumes. "With *Munch*, we were overly ambitious with the story and weren't able to get the technology to where we needed it," admits Lanning. "We compromised the true vision drastically, and I don't want to do that with the quintology."

So, this isn't the same whimsical blend of cuddly characters, run-n-jump gameplay, and brain-bending puzzles of past *Oddworld* games: *Stranger* takes the series in a decidedly different, surprisingly violent direction. "Think of it as Sergio Leone meets Oddworld," jokes Lanning. "We wanted to build a new engine, to take a new design approach, and to flesh out a new characteristic of Oddworld...we didn't want it to just be Abe's planet; we wanted to say that Oddworld is a place where a lot of things can happen."

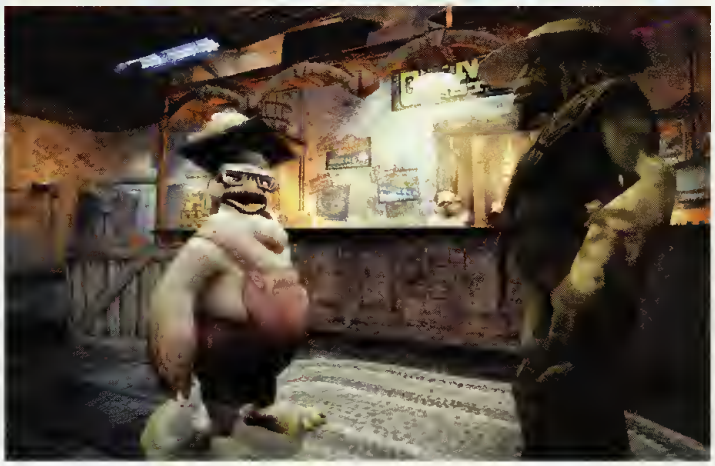
You play the titular Stranger, a brooding, burly gunslinger belonging to the steef race (he looks like a...camelbear). "He's a loner with a desperate health issue that he has to raise money for," Lanning explains. "Our previous heroes were guys with really strong hearts and weak bodies, whereas the Stranger has a strong body but a weak heart." He uses that strong body to hunt bounties. Luckily, Oddworld has no shortage of dastardly creeps who need to be brought to justice...dead or alive. Here's the gameplay flow: Stranger waltzes into a one-horse town, hitting up the locals for info on wanted criminals. Once he's gathered the intel and accepted a bounty, he's off to catch his prize. You can view the action from either a first-person perspective (best for precise aiming and strafing during shoot-outs) or behind-the-beast third-person view (preferable for running and jumping).











→ The notion of "live ammo" (below) takes on a whole new meaning in *Stranger*, where our hero literally straps live critters onto his dynamic crossbow before blasting them toward his enemies. Somehow, as gimmicky and cheesy as this may sound, it never gets old. The animation quality and sound effects combine to form one of the most hilarious and action-packed shooters you'll ever play.



STAANGEA IN AN UNKIND LAND

Oddworld Stranger has already had a long, odd journey to completion. Initially revealed to the world on a 2003 Discovery Channel special about first-party Xbox development, it was later canned in the same cancellation salvo that cut *Psychonauts*, *Tork*, *True Fantasy Live Online*, *Mythica*, and several sports titles from the Microsoft lineup. Thankfully, EA Games stepped in to pinch-publish, saving the title from an untimely doom...well, mostly. EA Games announced a PlayStation 2 version of *Stranger* shortly after acquiring the title, but later quietly unannounced it, citing slower-than-anticipated development progress.



Coping with two perspectives sounds tricky, but it's actually quite natural—switching between the two requires a simple button press, and your controls work just as well in both.

Before you approach the crook's hideout, it's best to load up on ammo for Stranger's trusty crossbow. You won't find what you're looking for in the general store, though: *Stranger* introduces a suitably twisted take on traditional gunplay affectionately dubbed "live ammo." Rather than loading up your crossbow with standard bolts, you'll be cramming all manner of critters into its firing track. This unique ammo system truly sets *Stranger* apart from its FPS brethren—each of the game's 16 projectiles affects enemies differently, opening the door up for some absurdly strategic combinations. For example, lure unsuspecting foes over with an annoying chippunk (wisecrackin' chipmunks who sass back before you fire them), stun them with a few bolomites (nasty insects who wrap choking tendrils around foes), then finish them off with a barrage of highly explosive boombats.

Although the core gameplay bears little resemblance to the quintology titles, the unique *Oddworld* style remains intact. This part of the world looks quite different—it's a grimy, postindustrial Wild West wasteland—yet it still springs to life with the lush attention to detail and slick creativity the *Oddworld* games are known for. Likewise, the series' trademark humor still comes through, largely through the over-the-top GameSpeak, which lets you verbally interact with every character at the touch of a button.

Really, the only thing missing is multiplayer action. "There won't be any multiplayer in this one," says Lanning. "This time, we break ground and give players these abilities, then we'll take that chemistry into real head-to-head multiplayer for the next one."

GMR SAYS → With Oddworld's former design team off making its own Western-themed FPS (*Darkwatch*), it'll be interesting to see who comes out on top. *Stranger* looks tough to beat.

→ HOW HOT...

RELEASE | JANUARY

PLAYBOY: THE MANSION

HUNTING BUNNIES

□SYSTEM PC/PS2/XB □PUBLISHER ARUSH/GROOVE GAMES □DEVELOPER CYBERLORE STUDIOS



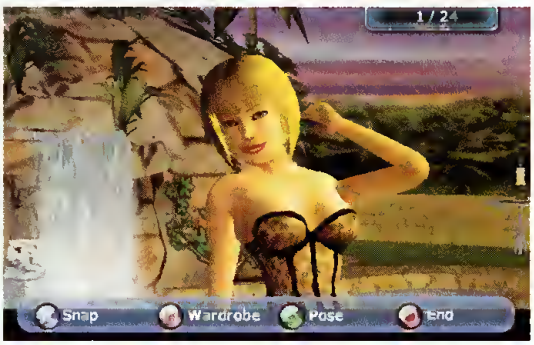






→ Living in the Playboy Mansion gives you scads of opportunities for business and pleasure. Woo a lady with some sexy talk and parlor games, put her on the cover, and then lead to your boudoir for some hanky-panky.





Ask any pornography-reading, red-blooded American male if he's ever fantasized about being Hugh Hefner, the founder of *Playboy*, and there's a good chance he'll say yes. The parties, the women, and the savoir faire...who else encapsulates both the dual fantasies of a hedonistic lifestyle and the American dream of self-made success so perfectly?

Well, even if you don't accept that premise, you still have a chance to simulate his lifestyle and emulate his success with *Playboy: The Mansion*.

Taking a big handful of pages out of *The Sims*' book, *The Mansion* lets you immerse yourself in business and pleasure. You control Hef in the game, and it's your responsibility to do everything from expanding and decorating your mansion to putting together issues of the magazine.

As he's apt to in the real world, the digital Hef throws frequent parties. Anyone from fictional photographers to real celebrities—to your friends, if you put them in the game—might turn up. But this isn't all for fun—it's a great place to make contacts. Hef's got a magazine to put together.

To complete an issue, you need an article, interview, essay, pictorial, and of course, a cover shot. You can commission articles from jobbing journalists who turn up at your shindigs. The photo sessions are a bit more...intimate. If you persuade a model to pose (topless, of course) for you, it's up to you to take the shots yourself.

The girls may not quite be *Dead or Alive* quality, but the game isn't trying to get your rocks off—it's about setting a mood. *Playboy: The Mansion* understands the balance that *The Guy Game* failed to. It spices up a solid game with calculated raunchiness. If you've always wanted an excuse to lay carpet in *The Sims* but felt it violated your manhood, how's the fact that you can roll around on it with a Playmate after you're done sound?

GMR SAYS → What's surprising about this one is the depth. Sure, breasts are bared but gameplaywise, it's more than a quickie.

→ HOW HOT...

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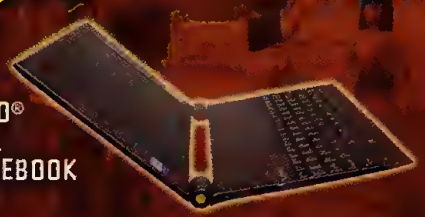
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RELEASE | FEBRUARY

BROTHERS IN ARMS

VALOR, DUTY, AND HONOR

☐SYSTEM PC/PS2/XB ☐PUBLISHER UBISOFT ☐DEVELOPER GEARBOX







→ See these guys? They're more than mindless drones that fight beside you. Using the game's simple cursor system, you can send them where you need them. Suppressing enemy fire is key to your survival.







The World War II FPS market is beyond crowded—it's overloaded. Most publishers have taken this as a signal to abandon ship, many heading for Vietnam. Ubisoft and Gearbox have instead decided it's time to change the game.

Gearbox, most notable for handling *Half-Life*'s expansion packs, emphasizes attention to detail and new ideas with *Brothers in Arms*. "This is the most realistic and authentic World War II game ever created," offers Marc Tardiff, Gearbox's director of third-party relations. A difficult argument, but he's not making this assertion without evidence.

As with any top-shelf WWII FPS, Gearbox has hired a consultant, retired U.S. Army Col. John Antal. He provided the developer with info on *everything*. Gearbox also visited the National Archives hunting for intel. After-action reports from real WWII soldiers were used to design the game's story and objectives.

Ignoring the "more is more" philosophy embraced by a lot of WWII games, *Brothers in Arms* sticks with one lead character and his squad for a short period in time—an eight-day period starting the day before D-Day. This leads to a deeper, tighter story.

The gameplay isn't quite typical, either. It's almost like the halfway point between *Call of Duty* and *Full Spectrum Warrior*. While *Brothers* is definitely an action-packed FPS, you also have to think. You can issue orders quickly; your team will pin down enemies or take out hidden soldiers so you can press onward.

In multiplayer, it's the same. Each man gets his own A.I. team, allowing the online game to retain the single-player game's tactical flair. If it works, it could be genius; if it doesn't, it'll at least be novel. In fact, that sums up *Brothers in Arms* as a whole. It's a shot in the arm for a type of game that's becoming all too familiar.

GMA SAYS → *Call of Duty* made war cinematic. *Full Spectrum Warrior* made it tactical. Now, *Brothers in Arms* will bridge the gap. We've heard worse ideas.

→ HOW HOT...

RELEASE | SPRING 2005

NBA STREET V3
GOING SKY

SYSTEM GC/PS2/XB PUBLISHER EA SPORTS DEVELOPER EA CANADA

We know you think you've seen the best of the sports games on this generation's consoles. In terms of gameplay and visuals, the ceiling looks like it's been hit, right? Well, rewind that notion real quick, because you ain't seen nothing yet. EA's back with the third edition of *NBA Street*, titled *V3*, and it looks insane.

After Midway's *NBA Ballers*, the stakes were set high. The players' facial features in that game rival anything seen in the *NBA Live* or *ESPN NBA* series. The animations are fluid and realistic without taking away from any of *Ballers'* lighthearted absurdity or arcadelike energy. Now, EA takes those expectations and burns right through them with this full-court slamfest that reinvents the campy action-sports genre once again.

In *V3*, the newly designed players bear a frightening resemblance to the real thing. You'll battle across the asphalt of various courts, including New York's famous Rucker Park and the Cage. Pick from more than 175 NBA players, all capable of pulling off the zany fakes and tricks that *And 1 Mixtapes* are made of. What's more, *V3* will get its very own slam-dunk contest, just like its mature cousin, *NBA Live 2005*! Here, the contest presentation has richer textures and one of the slickest lighting engines ever seen in an EA game. The challenge is to perform as many tricks as possible in midair as you glide toward the basket for the dunk.

V3 even lets you create your own basketball court. Everything from the backboard to the insignia on the court is customizable. *V3* adds more stylish moves to help you rock Gamebreakers, which look better and deadlier than ever. And if all this wasn't enough, imagine all of it online on PS2 and Xbox. Well, you can count on that, as well as customizable clothing options galore. Between its superior player models and potential for jaw-dropping gameplay moments, this might end up being the *Burnout 3* of basketball games.

GMA SAYS → It's all that and online too? Listen up, all y'all, this *Street* is gonna be hard to beat. Word.

→ HOW HOT...







→ Take your custom pimped-out court online and amaze the competition with how slick your rig is.



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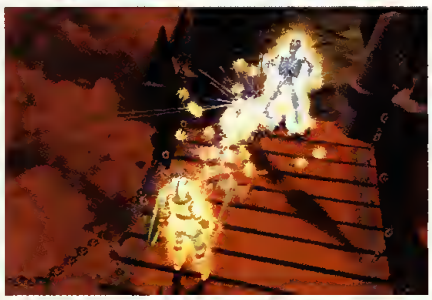
RELEASE | FEBRUARY

CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH: RETURN TO ARMS

IKSAR SHAMAN NEEDS FOOD BADLY

☐SYSTEM PS2 ☐PUBLISHER SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT ☐DEVELOPER SNOWBLIND STUDIOS











→ SOE's excellent *Diablo*-esque dungeon-crawler for PS2 returns with two new races to play as, and a vastly improved multiplayer system that addresses the flaws from the first game. New server-side character storage ensures that you can access your character from nearly any location, for a quick game of online multiplayer fun.

Fans of cooperative dungeon-crawling action, take heart: *Champions of Norrath: Return to Arms* features a more structured single-player campaign, as well as a host of new multiplayer options and fresh character additions to keep you traipsing through the world of Norrath for a good long while.

The most obvious and immediate new additions to *Return to Arms* are the Iksar shaman and the Vah Shir berserker, which are, respectively, magic- and melee-oriented characters. The Vah Shir has some particularly cool options, including the ability to use his throwing axes for both melee and ranged combat.

We recently had a chance to take our own Vah Shir berserker, the aptly named Panthro, for a test spin online. *Return to Arms* features a much more user-friendly player-matching service than its predecessor; it includes public and private chat, friends lists, and the convenient option to sort available games by name, type, or difficulty. Characters can also be stored server-side for easy access from any location.

Up to four players can participate in any of the game's three multiplayer modes. The story mode is, of course, an online version of the single-player mode, with the host player in charge of critical choices such as the good and evil story paths. Cleric fans should note the character's new Resurrection spell, which is especially handy in this mode.

Survival is the name of the game in the cooperative mode, which pits players against wave after wave of increasingly difficult foes. And finally, the head-to-head game lets you test your character's mettle against other seasoned players in a battle to the death. How did the mighty Panthro fare? Let's just say it's a good thing cats have nine lives.

GMR SAYS → *Champions of Norrath* is the modern equivalent of *Gauntlet*, and with a host of improvements all around, *Return to Arms* gives us every indication that it will be even better than its already-solid predecessor

→ HOW HOT...


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RELEASE | DECEMBER 2004

STAR WARS KOTOR II: THE SITH LORDS

COMIN' IN WITH LIGHTSABERS SWINGING

☐SYSTEM PC/XB ☐PUBLISHER LUCASARTS ☐DEVELOPER OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT







→ That same great Force-y taste, and possibly even more filling Force-y fun. The best game of 2003 returns in this technically improved sequel. The only thing that remains to be seen is if Obsidian can maintain the same quality of dialogue and plot cohesion that distinguished the first game.





Some *Star Wars* fans grumbled when they heard the sequel to *Knights of the Old Republic* was being handed off to a new developer, but it seems their complaints were unfounded. Not only has Obsidian not ruined anything, it's managed to improve on the best game of 2003.

Anyone who played the first *Knights* will feel instantly at home with *The Sith Lords*, as it's nearly identical from a gameplay standpoint. Everything that worked well in the first game—the Force powers, the flashy melee fighting, even the onscreen interface—has been left just the way you remember it.

At the same time, Obsidian has left its mark through subtle retooling and additions. The simple convenience of switching weapons on the fly makes combat a little quicker, and a new crafting system—which lets players make and dismantle medkits, blasters, and such—is just plain cool.

Set five years after *Knights*, the game opens with your custom-made, amnesiac Jedi waking up in the deserted Peragus mining outpost. Weak and mostly defenseless, you'll find yourself relying on Kreia (an elderly Jedi who acts like Judi Dench in a foul mood) and roguish Atton Rand for help.

There's not much to do on Peragus apart from fighting haywire droids and being stalked by a monstrous Sith lord, though, so you'll want to haul ass to the docking bay, where a certain familiar spaceship (OK, it's the *Ebon Hawk*) is waiting.

The experience is tied together with excellent writing, acting, and cinematic pacing. As in the first game, a healthy chunk of time is spent navigating conversations, which feel a little deeper than before. You can still be a jerk or a saint, and certain skills can now affect the outcome of a conversation, delivering much the same experience as *Knights*, and that's a good thing.

GMR SAYS → Can the dark side path involve killing Ewoks this time? Please?

→ HOW HOT...

You're racing against time.





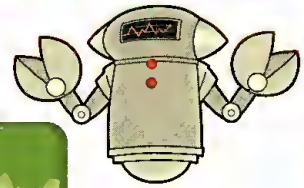
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*Note: Wireless multiplayer gameplay requires each player to have their own Nintendo DS system and a copy of the game.

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RELEASE | JANUARY

MERCENARIES

GRAND THEFT HUMVEE

☐SYSTEM PS2/XB ☐PUBLISHER LUCASARTS ☐DEVELOPER PANDEMIC STUDIOS







→ Aside from having different strengths, the three playable mercenaries each understand different languages. You'll have to play as all three to know what nasty things people are saying behind your back.





For a game set in North Korea, *Mercenaries* offers a remarkable degree of freedom. Imagine *Grand Theft Auto* in a lush, hilly countryside where everyone has guns and drives military vehicles, and you'll have a good idea of what to expect.

Giving players a choice of three soldiers of fortune, *Mercenaries* drops them straight into the Korean DMZ to hunt down a deck of 52 wanted fugitives for the "Allied Nations." Starting out, you'll have to run an errand for each of the factions that have carved up the North—the AN, the South Koreans, the Russian Mafia, and the Chinese—but then you're cut loose to do as you please. And in a great big country crawling with tanks, the potential for mayhem is nearly endless.

So if you should get bored stealing stuff for the mob or protecting South Korean troops, you can always take a break and bring down a few buildings with C4 charges. Feel like flattening Pyongyang? Go right ahead, but be aware that everything you do can affect your faction standing, which determines who wants to give you jobs and who wants to just shoot at you.

Tearing around the vast landscape in a hijacked Humvee or chopper is fun, but the vehicles are good for more than just joyriding. Honk at some friendly soldiers, and they'll pile in and man the guns, *Halo* style. The right car can also be a disguise, allowing you to prowl through enemy territory unchallenged.

On foot, the game gets more intense. Aside from being able to pick up enemy weapons, you can call in favors from your faction buddies if things get too hot. Whether you need an air strike, a medevac, or a shiny new H2, it's yours if you're friends with the right people.

The mix of military realism with balls-out, car-stealing bedlam is a strange one, but it works. If the manic pace holds up through all 52 captures, we could be looking at a winner.

GMR SAYS → It doesn't have *San Andreas*' depth, but the ability to destroy absolutely everything might make you forget about that.

→ HOW HOT...

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GALLERY

FINAL FANTASY VII: DIRGE

HIS NAME IS VINCENT

Everyone's favorite vampire is back, and this time he's got his own game. As if *FFVII*'s Vincent Valentine's dramatic appearance in Square Enix's upcoming CG movie *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* weren't enough, Squenix recently unveiled Tetsuya Nomura's (*Kingdom Hearts*) top-secret new project, *Final Fantasy VII: Dirge of Cerberus*. In this slick combination of third- and first-person gunplay, Valentine takes center stage for another dip into the Shinra lore that takes place shortly after the events of *FFVII*. As part of Square Enix's Compilation of Final Fantasy VII initiative to build on the mythology of its most popular game, *Dirge of Cerberus* is set to arrive on PlayStation 2 in 2005.





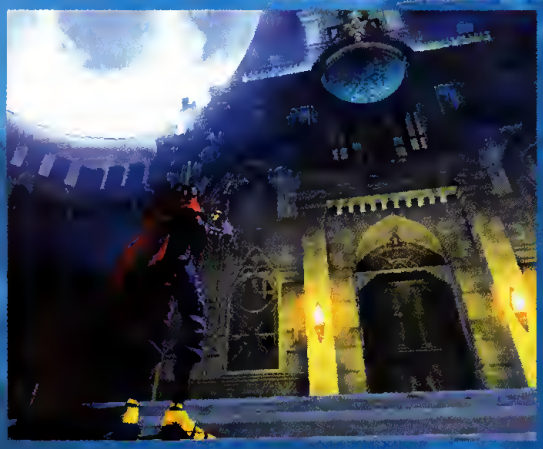


→ Vincent (not Vega) Valentine puts out the hot rod, which is apparently triple-barreled and no joke. His cape has seen better days though. Above, the diminiutive Cait Sith takes a moonlight stroll through the neighborhood (although his big, bulbous buddy is nowhere to be found). What role will the little kitty play in *Dirge of Cerberus*? We'll find out in 2005.

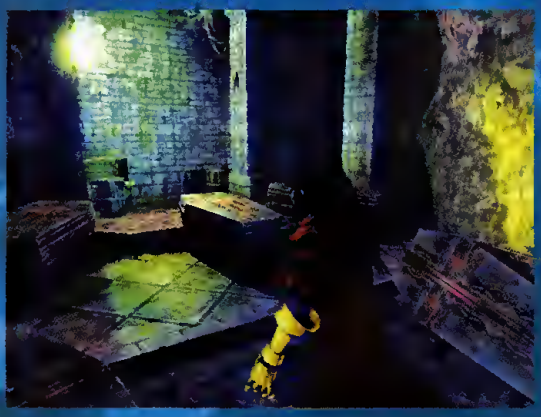




OF CERBERUS





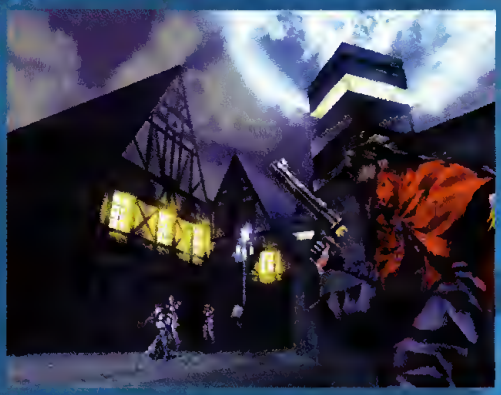




→ *Final Fantasy VII: Dirge of Cerbarus* takas a cue from Capcom's *Devil May Cry*, taking possibly *FFVII*'s most bad-ass charactar, and putting him in an environment in which he'll thrive. The Shinra soldiars got nothin' comparad to the vampirish Vincent's otharworldly powars (and guns).







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GET READY TO GET TOUCHY-FEELY WITH NINTENDO'S AMAZING NEW HANDHELD AND ITS GAMES

BY CHRISTIAN NUTT



This Thanksgiving, Nintendo's bold attempt to alter the face of portable gaming finally hits. From the first confusing words about the system early this year to the promising tech shown at E3, the Nintendo DS has kept gamers guessing.

Over the course of the year, the DS has gone from imaginary to real. It has also transformed from dorky at E3 to stylish at Nintendo's recent Gamers Summit—and with that change has come a solid lineup of games.

What should you be looking out for, though? While some of the killer apps—*Animal Crossing DS*, anyone?—are still all but unknown, a nice big handful of solid games is landing this year. Better, many of them take advantage of the DS' cool features, including the touch screen, Wi-Fi support, and two-screen play. Whether the DS truly revolutionizes handheld play is not important—it's clear that we're primed for some awesome games.

FEEL THE MAGIC: XX/XY

PUB SEGA DEV SONIC TEAM REL NOVEMBER

It had to happen—gamers aren't the only people who noticed that *WarioWare Inc.* is the best thing going on the GBA. Sonic Team did, too, and has responded by creating a game that marries eclectic gameplay with funkiness. *Feel the Magic* isn't aimed at kids. It's for grown-up gamers who want the fun of *WarioWare* paired with humor and style.

Its striking '60s-influenced visuals and catchy soundtrack provide a hook; the gameplay will reel you in. As a nameless guy trying to impress his girl, the player is led into crazy situations by the "Rub Rabbits"—a sort of cross between Cupid and the demonic bunny from *Donnie Darko*.

To win his lady, the main character grabs some goldfish (not what we'd go for, but hey...). Unfortunately, a stumble results in a passerby swallowing 'em. Using the stylus, you have to coax the fish out of his gullet and back into your bowl. What about putting out candles? Just blow on the DS' built-in microphone. You'll also have to save your honey from an enraged bull by tapping him with the stylus.



HOW IT USES THE DS: Of course, you use the stylus to play most of the minigames—in the demo, one used the microphone as well. Although the graphics look simple in screenshots, full 3D is used often.

METROID PRIME HUNTERS: FIRST HUNT

PUB NINTENDO DEV NST REL NOVEMBER

The full version of *Metroid Prime: Hunters* is hitting in 2005, but Nintendo has decided to give every DS buyer a taste of the action by packing in a playable demo of the game with the unit. Better yet, the demo version lets you compete against friends and foes over the DS' built-in wireless connection.

Since its E3 debut, *Hunters* has come a long way. What was clunky then has been ironed out, and it's clear that the DS provides for some surprisingly accurate and swift FPS gameplay. You walk with the D-pad, aim with the stylus, and fire with the shoulder buttons (of course, there's a lefty mode for controls). Jumping involves just a quick tap on the screen.

This control method works shockingly well, and it'll take no more than a few moments before you're up to speed—but, fortunately, the developers have thrown in some single-player training and survival levels to hone your skills on before you jump onto the wireless network.

HOW IT USES THE DS: Replicating the sensitivity of a mouse with the stylus gives *Hunters* arguably the most accurate aiming in a non-PC-based FPS yet. The control setup simply isn't possible on any other handheld. The wireless multiplayer will make it a DS hit.



SPIDER-MAN 2

PUB ACTIVISION DEV VICARIOUS VISIONS REL NOVEMBER

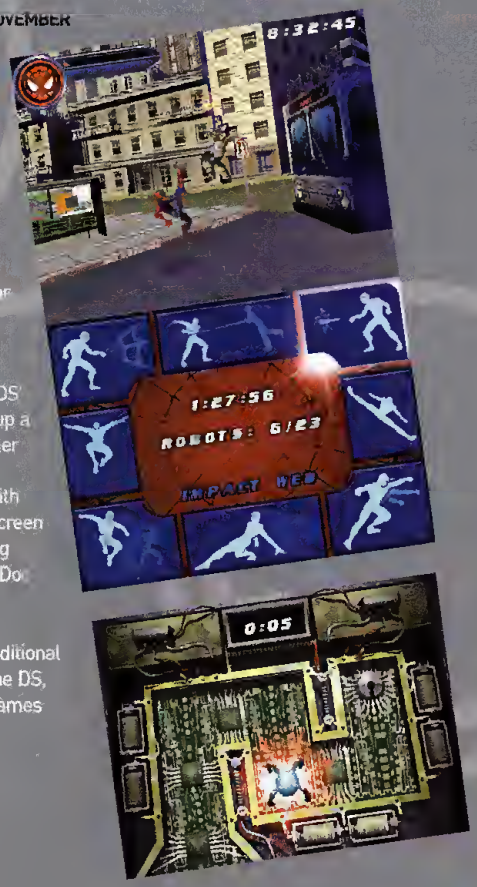
Activision's first attempt at a DS game is no slouch, offering up tried-and-true thug-fighting antics. Sure, it doesn't tax the DS in some important ways—its touch/dual screen functions are on the afterthought side of things—but it's definitely primed to provide solid action.

Naturally, you take control of Spidey and do what he does—battle the forces of evil and help the innocent. You'll explore huge levels, looking for hostages and tracking down evildoers, all in traditional side-scrolling fashion.

And while this game is a by-the-book side-scroller, developer Vicarious Visions is using the DS' power to dress it up in sexy 3D visuals and offer up a slew of Spider-Man's moves at the touch of a finger through the convenience of the second screen.

The levels are large and reward exploration with hidden bonuses; the boss battles use the touch screen to add in clever puzzle elements—such as hacking computer terminals, defusing bombs, or battling Doc Ock's tentacles—in between bouts of fisticuffs.

HOW IT USES THE DS: While it's essentially a traditional side-scroller, the game's full-3D graphics push the DS, and some cleverly integrated touch-screen minigames help, too. It works.



SUPER MARIO 64 DS

PUB NINTENDO DEV NINTENDO REL NOVEMBER

There's a distinct likelihood you've played *Super Mario 64*, given that it sold something like 6 million copies. Released eight years ago for Nintendo's then shiny and new Nintendo 64 system, it took 3D platform gaming to an entirely new level.

The game has lost very little of its charm in the intervening years, and Nintendo is making sure to add in a number of amusing new features to make the DS version more palatable. Of course, there's nothing wrong with *Super Mario 64*'s genre-defining gameplay to begin with—even though it's a game you've played before, it's definitely worth revisiting.

But Nintendo has stuffed in three new playable characters—Luigi, Yoshi, and Wario—and a multiplayer battle mode. There is also a host of minigames and a new area (complete with a brand-new boss battle) to spice things up as well. Yeah, it's a remake, but it's remade enough to recapture our interest.



HOW IT USES THE DS: Yes, *Super Mario 64 DS* is a port of the N64 game. To replicate the analog control scheme, the developers have added in optional second-screen control—let's hope it works. Of course, there's also wireless multiplayer.

WARIOWARE INC. DS

PUB NINTENDO DEV NINTENDO REL 2005

We'll forgive Nintendo for not making much use of the second screen with this one, because the company has created the secret killer app for the DS—just as the original game was among the GBA's best.



WarioWare for the DS will put your writing hand to the test with a collection of stylus-based games that prove the DS' innovation is no fluke. The speedy craziness of the original is kept intact, but the input method makes this a whole new 'Ware.

Humor, of course, is a big part of the *WarioWare* experience, and the DS version is no different. When Nintendo argues that simple gameplay is the key to saving the marketplace, it usually sounds crazy, but *WarioWare* makes for a compelling argument. The DS version is as good as you hoped it would be. If you never played the GBA original, get ready for a revelation about the addiction potential of handheld gaming.



HOW IT USES THE DS: Well, for dual-screen action, *WarioWare* is mostly a wash. But the games use the stylus in dozens of creative ways, and that makes the game the least of the DS pack.

ADVANCE WARS DS

PUB NINTENDO DEV INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
REL 2005

Little is yet known about the latest in the *Advance Wars* series. Nintendo hasn't let anyone play it yet, nor has it really presented anything but screenshots.

Fortunately, the game seems to be following closely in the footsteps of its popular predecessors while expanding upon the experience by spilling over onto two screens.





HOW IT USES THE DS: Nintendo hasn't let us get our hands on this one yet, but it seems clear that you'll use the stylus for movement. The second screen is used for info and graphics. And, of course, the thought of wireless link play is a very pleasant one indeed.

SPRUNG

PUB UBISOFT DEV UBISOFT
REL NOVEMBER

Developers have been promising that the DS will let them try new ideas. *Sprung* does just that. You play as a flirtatious single trying to hook up. On the top screen, you see your target; on the bottom is your character—and a lineup of sassy come-ons.

Yeah, it sounds a little "off," but the game's appeal becomes more apparent if you give it a second look. The dialogue is humorous or just plain bizarre, for one, and the well-animated characters clearly express emotion. Whether it works for more than a few minutes is still a mystery, but you can't fault 'em for trying.



HOW IT USES THE DS: It makes good use of the dual screens, and the increased capabilities of the DS allow for cleaner and clearer artistic representations of the game's amorous characters.

MADDEN NFL 2005

PUB EA DEV EA REL NOVEMBER

The all-conquering champion of football games appears in time for the DS' debut. *Madden NFL 2005* on DS is a big leap over the company's GBA efforts and, in fact, instantly recalls the PlayStation era.



3D football players adorn the top screen while play calling is handled on the bottom—perfect for the wireless play. The game will also include a season mode, so you can simulate on the go.

HOW IT USES THE DS: Cheat-free play calling is a big plus for the wireless link-up play. Of course, the 3D graphics are a handheld *Madden* first, and the bottom screen is used for an overview of the play when you're not picking strategies.

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RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.

PUPPY TIMES

PUB: NINTENDO DEV: NINTENDO REL: 2005



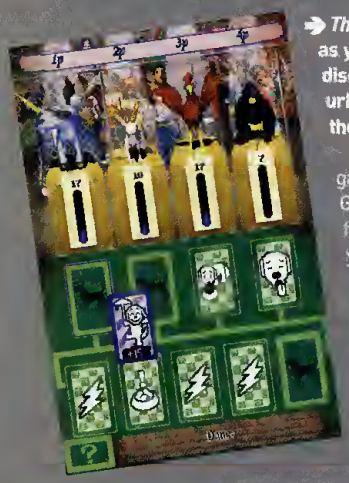
A true departure from usual goal-based games, *Puppy Times* actually simulates raising a dog on your DS. Instead of offering challenges to surmount, it offers lifelike re-creations of puppies bounding to and fro in a room, and you have toys (like Frisbees) you can use to play with them.

Thanks to *Puppy Times*' excellent visuals and animation, you'll quickly become attached to your cute little charges. It sounds weird but looks great—surprisingly polished and shockingly lifelike, in fact.

HOW IT USES THE DS: The 3D graphics provide the visual clout necessary to make this one interesting. The stylus is used to pet your pups and control your toys. Even better, you can call to your mini doggy using the DS' built-in mic.

THE URBZ

PUB: EA DEV: EA REL: NOVEMBER



The Urbz: Sims in the City, as you may have discovered by now, is EA's urban-style offshoot of the popular *Sims* series.

The DS version of the game is based on the GBA edition, which focuses on the life of your Sim as you travel through the urban landscape accruing fame, prestige, tattoos, earrings, and crappy pets. Yeah, it's a bizarre mix of goals, but it makes for a compelling game for those who like to manage a character from the ground up and completely control his or her life.

HOW IT USES THE DS: While the game is based on the GBA version, EA is taking care to add something all new—in fact, an entire new area, Splicer Island. Here you can participate in *Jurassic Park*–style DNA experimentation (complete with an amber-etching minigame that uses the stylus) to create prehistoric pets.



ASPHALT URBAN GT

PUB: GAMELOFT DEV: GAMELOFT REL: NOVEMBER

This racing game for the DS takes a very timely approach—it's an urban racer hot on the heels of *Need for Speed Underground*, *SRS*, and the rest of the crowd of street racers heating up the big consoles.

Featuring real licensed cars from manufacturers like Audi and Volkswagen and using full 3D graphics, *Asphalt* certainly looks like a contender. True to its street style, it allows you to trick out your car with a bunch of aftermarket parts and race for cash—in locations taken from real-world cities like Paris and New York.

HOW IT USES THE DS: The wireless multiplayer is a DS must, a fact that is quickly becoming apparent. Really, *Asphalt Urban GT* is a pretty straightforward racer without many DS-specific features, but there's nothing wrong with that.

RIDGE RACER DS

PUB: NAMCO DEV: NST REL: NOVEMBER



Namco's erstwhile racing series reappears on the DS. Originally planned as a port of *Ridge Racer 64*, the game has been expanded to include tracks from the original *Ridge Racer* and its sequel *Revolution*, which both previously appeared on PlayStation.

The game is as tight and responsive as a *Ridge Racer* game should be, and it will doubtlessly provide corner-cruising action for early adopters. Ask any true arcade-racing fan who the king is, and *Ridge Racer*'s name will still come up.

HOW IT USES THE DS: Well, *Ridge Racer* really wouldn't be possible without 3D graphics. The developers have implemented analog-style thumb steering on the touch screen, but it's a bit gimmicky compared to the regular D-pad action. Figure out which one you like best by competing in the wireless multiplayer mode.



YOSHI'S TOUCH & GO

PUB: NINTENDO DEV: NINTENDO DATE: 2005

This unique game takes the setup from SNES hit *Yoshi's Island* (Yoshi has to ferry baby Mario back to his parents) in a totally new direction. Instead of controlling Yoshi directly, you create pathways for him to follow and instruct him where to jump and when to throw his eggs.

It sounds a little weird, but it works really well in practice, with the stylus used very well. While it's not a traditional Nintendo 2D platformer, it's a nice step away from the recycling that has marked the GBA's lineup.

HOW IT USES THE DS: As the game begins, baby Mario descends through the sky toward Yoshi. You must draw pathways around enemies so he avoids them and picks up coins. Once he lands, Yoshi will start walking—and it's your job to help him avoid obstacles. Indirect control has never been so much fun.



All natural resources have been exhausted, enemy alliances are strong, and everyone is fighting for what is left. The end of the world is near. You are a renegade soldier, equipped with the ultimate mech weaponry. Your prime mission is to save what is left by taking down enemy armored tanks in strategic co-op play, or head-to-head combat. Play with up to 8 players via Xbox *Live* and battle in 3 different modes of online combat. The future is in your hands...are you ready to fight for it?

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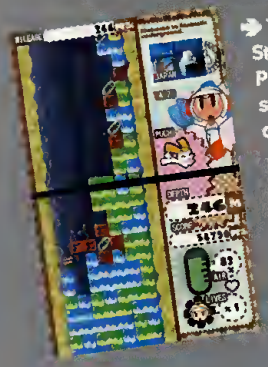
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MR. DRILLER: DRILL SPIRITS

PUB NAMCO DEV NAMCO REL NOVEMBER



The best-kept secret in puzzle gaming finally gets a serious shot in the States thanks to the DS. When the original appeared on Dreamcast, PlayStation, and Game Boy Color in 2000, few people took notice. The series is a smash in Japan, though, where gamers are attracted to its colorful style and addictive gameplay.

The point of the game is to drill down through layers of multicolored rocks and eventually reach the bottom. Sure, it's simple, but it's also superaddictive—and perfect for portable gaming. The series has only been getting better since its debut—notably on GameCube, where fan-favorite import *Drill Land* made a splash.



HOW IT USES THE DS: *Mr. Driller*'s simple arcade-style gameplay doesn't leave a lot of room for innovation, but Namco is packing both screens full of blocks, offering a more arcade-style view of the action, and of course, wireless multiplayer abounds.

TOUCH THE FUTURE

The games you've just read about are only a fraction of the titles lined up for Nintendo's latest handheld. Below, we list some of the most exciting games on the horizon. Please remember that many of these titles have not officially been announced for release in the United States, and even for the ones that have, details are few and far between. Good news, though: There are dozens more where these came from, with more than 100 DS titles currently in the works by developers around the world.

ANIMAL CROSSING DS — NINTENDO
With wireless play, we'll never stop trading furniture.

BOMBERMAN — HUDSON
Dual-screen, wireless blow-em-up action.

CASTLEVANIA — KONAMI
The best action series on GBA brings undead fun to the DS.

CHOROQ — ATLUS
Atlus answers Tom's wish and makes its CarPG handheld.

DYNASTY WARRIORS — KOEI
Slicing up Chinese warlords with a stylus? That sounds hot.

FF: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES — SQUARE ENIX
Multiplayer *Final Fantasy* goes portable.

FINAL FANTASY III — SQUARE ENIX
Want it more traditional? The only *FF* to never hit the U.S. hits the DS.

GOLDENEYE: ROGUE AGENT — ELECTRONIC ARTS
Bond's back in handheld form.

HARVEST MOON DS — NATSUME
How do you milk cows with a stylus?

JUMP SUPERSTARS — NINTENDO
A fighter based on the *Shonen Jump* comic, including *Dragon Ball Z*.

LUNAR — MARVELOUS INTERACTIVE
The once-great RPG series reappears. No details yet.

MEGA MAN BATTLE NETWORK — CAPCOM
Dive into the network and take care of business.

METEOS — BANDAI
Spaced-out puzzle action from the creators of *Rez* and *Kirby*.



→ Nintendo's point-and-click game *Another* stars a young girl who investigates mysteries. The touch screen is used to further the adventure.



→ Square Enix's first game for the DS is *Egg Monster Hero*, the latest in a long-running strategy series that has never come to the States before.



→ Konami's *Gambare Goemon*, often called *Legend of the Mystical Ninja* in the United States, features stunning graphics that look like paintings.

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM SEED — BANDAI
3D mech action based on the popular TV series.

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND — ELECTRONIC ARTS
The hottest series in racing zooms onto the DS.

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. — NINTENDO
Finally, Nintendo prepares an all-new handheld *Mario*.

PAC'N ROLL — NAMCO
Crazy 3D mazes for a roly-poly Pac-Man.

PAC-PIX — NAMCO
Draw your own Pac-Man and let him eat ghosts.

POKÉMON DIAMOND/PEARL — NINTENDO
The latest in the most popular series of games in the world.

RAYMAN DS — UBISOFT
The popular limbless hero stars in his first 3D handheld adventure.

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI DS — ATLUS
More mature post-apocalyptic RPG musings, now portable.

SONIC DS — SEGA
The speediest hedgehog in the world gets touchy.

SUPER PRINCESS PEACH — NINTENDO
Mario's honey finally takes a starring role.

TEAM NINJA'S DS PROJECT — TECMO
Ninja Gaiden, *Dead or Alive*, or something brand new?

UNTITLED RPG — NAMCO
Could this be a new portable *Tales* game? Odds are good.

VIEWTIFUL JOE — CAPCOM
Our favorite movie freak goes portable for the first time.


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Comic Mischief
Language
Mild Violence
Suggestive Themes

PlayStation.2

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TO ITS DRAMATIC CONCLUSION.
The conclusion,
the answers,
the end of the epic.
LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.

GMR

24 MONTHS OF US EQUALS 32

A RETROSPECTIVE OF COVERS AND DESIGN

When we started *GMR* 24 short months ago, we had a very clear vision: to inform and entertain, and be the best-looking magazine in the industry. While "best-looking" is subject to personal preference, our goal with every cover is to provide our audience with a sense of style they won't see on other magazines. We try to transcend the usual deluge of images, text, and busyness that most magazine covers generally suffer from.

Once we settle on what game we're going to put on the cover, we work as closely as possible with the game's publisher to try to procure an exclusive, if not custom, image. We then take that image and develop a concept around the game, a process that first really came together on our *Auto Modellista* cover, with its blend of red and blue stripes splashed against a white background. For our world-premier *Metal Gear Solid 3* issue, we played to the game's strengths, making our text treatment recede into the background via transparency, a nod to the game's focus on camouflage. The following month, Tecmo's Team Ninja did a custom CG render of Ryu Hayabusa for us based on a sketch done by Executive Editor James Mielke. We didn't just settle for the end product, though. What was originally a full-color render was reduced to its barest essen-











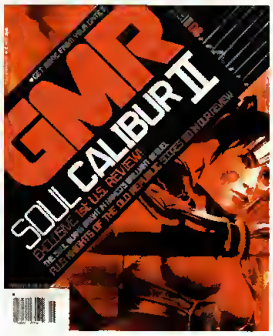


















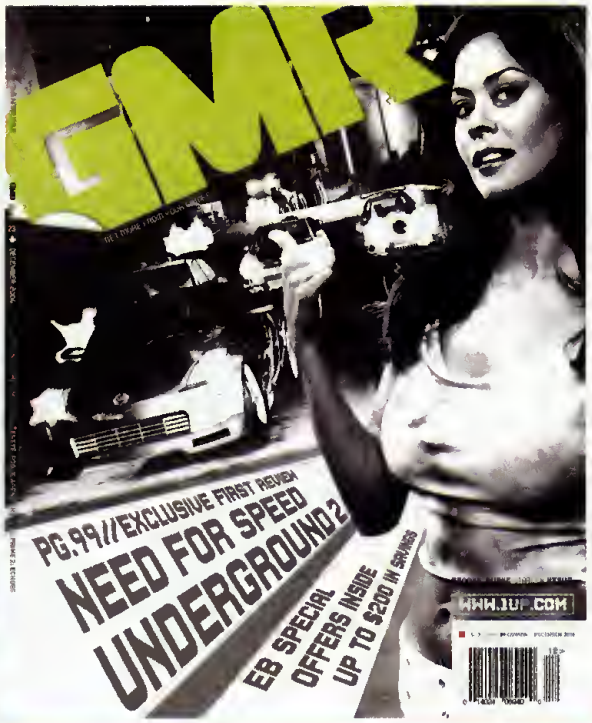




































tials—black and white—to help the bold, red text stand its ground next to the propulsive image of *Ninja Gaiden*'s hero. So too did Namco create our image of Taki for our *Soul Calibur II* cover, an angular exercise in taking cover lines (and logos) to a new extreme, and once again with a CG render designed to our specifications for our fashion-inspired Nina exposé.

But some of our more eye-opening covers have been the ones with the least to show, like our Ferrari-red *Republic Commando* issue, whose clone troopers were concealed behind the window of the *GMR* logo itself. Other times we'll go through hell and high water to find the best images possible for our covers, as was the case with *Onimusha 3*. We didn't want to use the same old stuff everyone had seen (Jean Reno, etc.). *On* a trip to Japan, we came across some promotional material of the game's villain, Garuganto, staring at us from a larger-than-life placard at the game-software shop Yodobashi Camera in Shinjuku. Knowing that North American gamers had yet to witness that image, we requested it imme-

Cutting-edge design with collectibility in mind.

diately, pushing and pulling it from its original full-color tones to the stark black-and-white, gritty, hazy, John Carpenter's *The Thing* vibe that finally made its way to newsstands.

Of course, few of the covers we designed could be as artistically frustrating/rewarding as our hella pink *Dead or Alive Ultimate/Fable* cover. We didn't want to run yet another Team Ninja CG render "as is," nor did we wish to just put Blue Box's *Fable* artwork on the cover as we received it. The two images were too far apart to cohere without some major adjustments. So using a variety of old cut 'n' paste techniques, we emulated the party fliers we distributed at clubs in Chicago and New York City during our punk-rock youth. The end result is nothing like you'd see on any other game magazine cover.

For our *Paper Mario* issue, we went back to the basics, unifying Mario, the text, and the paper concept in a simple, clean design. And with our recent *NFSU2* cover, the decision to embark into a monotone (with the exception of the lime-green pseudo-peel-off-sticker logo) silver cover helped bring hottie Brooke Burke and nitrous-fueled cars together in one of our most unique wraps of the year.

And as the new year warms up, expect us to adhere to the philosophy of cutting-edge design with collectibility in mind.

NOW

On the subject of 10: Though it is the highest possible score, a 10 is not perfect. Games are too subjective and too specialized to be called "perfect" or "the best ever" or what have you. A couple of games received a 10 out of 10 this month, which simply means that they have succeeded in being truly excellent experiences. Nothing more, nothing less.

HOW WE RATE

WARNING!! WHERE MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF A GAME ARE REVIEWED, *GMA* WILL MENTION DIFFERENCES ONLY IF THEY SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE GAMEPLAY!

YOUR GUIDE TO THE GMA SCORING SYSTEM

1 AWFULNESS 2 CRAPPOLA 3 PITIFUL 4 OOPS 5 AVERAGE 6 GOOD STUFF 7 RECOMMENDED 8 EXCELLENT 9 TOTALLY SICK 10 TIMELESS CLASSIC

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VIEWTIFUL JOE 2	GC/PS2	123
WWE SMACKDOWN! VS. RAW	PS2	085





HALO 2

SENSES WORKING OVERTIME

MATURE | XB

PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT
DEVELOPER: BUNGIE
PRICE: $49.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1-2 COOPERATIVE PLAY (1-16 ONLINE/LAN)
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

It's interesting how the tables have turned. Once relegated to runner-up status in terms of commercial success, Bungie's *Marathon* series was the thinking man's alternative to the more popular (and certainly more influential), twitch-centric, frenetic action of *Doom*. But a variety of circumstances (championing the Macintosh as its platform of choice being one of them) ensured that *Marathon* never achieved quite the same success as Id's seminal creation.

The years passed and Bungie's stable of software grew, including the critically acclaimed *Myth* series and the well-intentioned but flawed *Oni*. But it wasn't until the launch of the Xbox and the debut of *Halo* that Bungie hopped in the driver's seat, placing the rest of the industry firmly in its rear-view mirror.

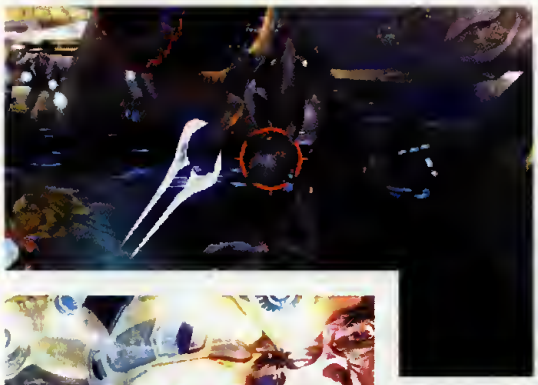
Taking a page out of the *Half-Life* playbook of storytelling-meets-action, *Halo* was groundbreaking for its time. Not so much for the inclusion of cinematic plot elements (although this certainly helped), but for finally bringing to a console an urgent, compelling first-person shooter that could stand tall with Valve's classic shooter while going toe-to-toe with all-out twitch blasters like *Unreal*. Master Chief and his beleaguered entourage had arrived.

After many delays (*Halo 2* was supposed to have shipped last year) the massively anticipated, shrouded-in-secrecy sequel is upon us, and the question must be answered: Is it all that? The conclusion, after playing the game from beginning to end and frenetically logging hours of multiplayer combat is that, yes, *Halo 2* is exactly what you wanted. No more, no less.

If that sounds like a weighted compliment, it's unreasonable to expect *Halo 2* to have the same impact the first game had. Bungie has simply put the adventures of Master Chief and Cortana in a more pronounced cinematic perspective, while adding subtle but meaningful tweaks to the gameplay to make it more challenging, more compelling, and more fun. This is top-tier gaming, make no mistake.







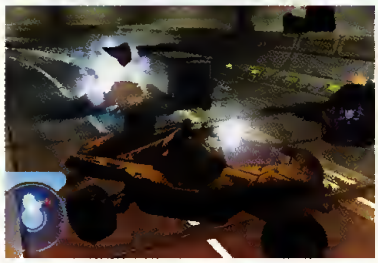


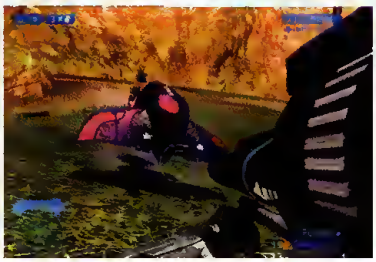
→ Captain Keyes has a hottie daughter, Miranda Keyes. She fights the good fight in daddy's absence. Good girl.



→ Despite the lack of publicity, *Halo 2* features a lot of high-caliber voice talent, including Ron Perlman, Michelle Rodriguez, and David Cross. Despite one Covenant who sounds like he's from Long Island, *Halo 2*'s acting is among the best in a game yet.







One of the most noticeable enhancements to *Halo 2* over the first game is the improved graphics. Go back and look at the first *Halo*. Compared to the first game's comparatively clean-cut graphics, *Halo 2* is on par with the dynamic visuals of newer games like *Chronicles of Riddick*, which is no small feat, given *Halo 2*'s open, expansive environments. Master Chief and all the supporting characters get face-lifts, too. They no longer look like refugees from a PC shooter; rather, they are rich with color, doused in lavish lighting, and far more detailed than before. Everything from weapons to vehicles looks brand new, and it's clear that Bungie has used *Halo 2*'s long development cycle to master the Xbox hardware. The only noticeable "problem" is that when the graphics mip-map at the beginning of nearly every scene, simplified character textures pop out for a more detailed set.

The gameplay is richer too, with the new dual-wield weapon system being the highlight (see: Beat Them at Their Own Game). Improved enemy A.I. (enemies duck for cover, peek out while shields are recharging, lay down covering fire, and coordinate in packs) is another, and superior level design addresses one of the main criticisms of the first game—*Halo* often devolved into a series of absurdly winding corridors (apparently the Covenant had something against straight lines). Now roadways make more sense, interior architecture is more logically designed, and outdoor environments seem more natural. The levels based on Earth feel like something plucked out of Mogadishu, allowing for tense gameplay, as Covenant snipers huddled in tight camping spots take skill to flush out. Other new additions, like the low-gravity outer-space level, airborne enemies, more resilient, intelligent CPU-controlled allies, and the hijack-an-enemy's-vehicle maneuver add layers of playability and finesse to what was already an extremely polished game.

Naturally, once gamers finish the story mode, they'll turn to the staggering array of multiplayer modes. Whether over broadband play with a grand total of



16 bloodthirsty players or via a more stable LAN party, *Halo 2*'s multiplayer options are nearly endless. The arenas are tighter, leading to frantic but focused combat, and taking advantage of all the weapons, vehicles, and turrets in all of the different game modes (fiesta, juggernaut, and swords are some of the best) will keep people playing for years. Simply put, *Halo 2* offers the best selection of multiplayer options in a console shooter since *Perfect Dark*.

Of course, on a purely technical level, *Halo 2* shines. The digital surround sound is phenomenal (and the voice acting peerless), and players with a good A/V system will enjoy hearing enemies approach from all sides due to the sharp positional sound. The musical score is another feather in *Halo 2*'s cap, offering classical Hollywood orchestration alongside punchy electronica and even the occasional guitar rock. On the video tip, *Halo 2*'s widescreen mode is not only attractive but also functional, particularly when it comes to playing cooperatively in vertical splitscreen.

In the end, *Halo 2* gains much ground but loses something in the process. The first game had a stark sense of mystery and a poignant loneliness that shadowed Master Chief wherever he went. This time around it's cowboys and Indians from the get-go, and for all its improvements, *Halo 2*'s a little less *Alien*, a little more *Aliens*. Which isn't a bad thing, but just as you come hootin' and a-hollerin' toward the end of the game (it'll take good players 15 hours or so), *Halo 2* basically hands players a big, fat prelude to Xbox 2. We waited an extra year for cliffhangers? Despite this, *Halo 2* provides more than enough reason to stick around for second and third helpings (not counting multiplayer), and that's the mark of a true classic.

_James Mielke

GMR EPIC **10**/10

BETTER THAN DOOM 3
TO BE CONTINUED
WAIT FOR IT HALO 3 (WE'RE NOT KIDDING)

2ND OPINION

Bungie promised *Halo* only better, and that's exactly what it delivers. Sharper graphics, more awesome combat, greatly expanded story elements, smarter enemies and friends—you name it. Especially in multiplayer, *Halo 2* surpasses the expectations we all had for it.

_Mark MacDonald
Executive editor, *EGM*

HALO 2: BEAT THEM AT THEIR OWN GAME

JUST BECAUSE BUNGIE HAS PUT TOGETHER ONE OF THE MOST SATISFYING, CHALLENGING GAMES OF THIS GENERATION DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE TO TAKE IT LYING DOWN. GET UP OFF THE GROUND AND PUT THIS HANDS-ON, BATTLE-HARDENED KNOWLEDGE TO WORK!



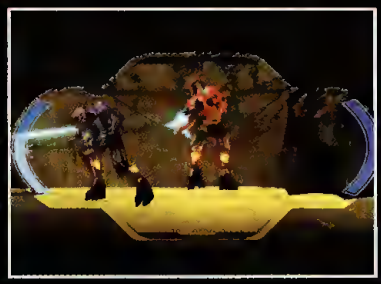
MIX AND MATCH

Halo 2's biggest gameplay advancement over the first game is the addition of dual-wield weapons. Not only does it double your firepower in that very distinct John Woo style, it also provides a stunning array of weapon combinations and strategic configurations.

While most grunts fall equally fast to hot lead or lethal bolts of plasma, Elites and Brutes require a lot more cunning, due to their energy shields and astute A.I. These enemies will duck for cover till their shields recharge and pin you down with covering fire. The higher the difficulty level you play on, the savvier they become.

So equalize the situation by mixing up your weaponry. While two SMGs might seem ballsy, you'll waste that much more ammo trying to take Elite shields down. So drop 'em and stop 'em by carrying a plasma rifle (or pistol) to decimate their shields and then perforate them with live ordnance of a metallic kind. Dual-wielding a plasma rifle and an SMG is one of the most effective combos in the game. But don't forget the dramatically improved needler. There's something to be said for pumping an enemy full of exploding homing shards while ducking out of the line of fire. As you refill your clip or let your shields recharge, the bad guy quietly explodes at his place of purchase. Another weapon of note is the Covenant carbine, which is the equivalent of the human sniper rifle. The advantage the carbine has over the sniper rifle is that it's quieter, which makes it invaluable in stealth situations. And in a pinch, the Covenant energy sword is both effective and lethal in close quarters. Ignore it at your peril.





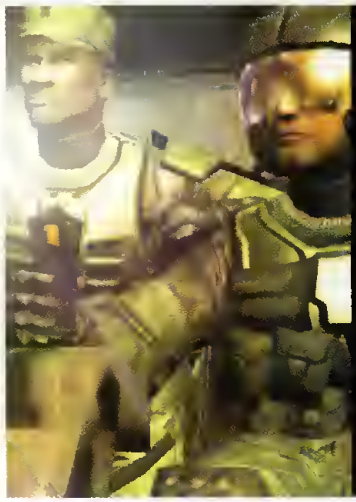


STICK 'EM AND QUIT 'EM

It might seem like a no-brainer, but it's easy to forget in the heat of battle that the Covenant grunts are chickens in armor. This can work to your advantage on multiple levels. One of the easiest ways to wreck a Covenant housewarming party is to slap a plasma grenade on an incoming grunt.



Not only does he recognize the hot, glowing blue threat sticking to his face/leg/arm as an incendiary device, but he usually goes running right back to his buddies in a state of panic. The result is an entire flock of grunts, Elites, and more blown to smithereens. The bonus effect is that fallen grunts often drop live grenades, resulting in an explosive chain reaction.



KILL YOUR MEN!

While it may not seem sporting to whack the home team, when you're playing on legendary mode, every last battery charge, grenade, and bit of ammo becomes absolutely essential. Which is why you should bag your buddies before the bad boys do. They won't last very long anyway, so consider it a mercy killing (save ammo, use a head shot) and then scoop up their stuff right away, or save it for later when your current supply runs out. Consider it a case of life or death, in this case: yours.

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GROWLANSER: GENERATIONS

STRATEGIC SIBLINGS

TEEN | PS2

Growlanser II and its sequel _Growlanser III_—both included in this package—won't win any graphics awards. Like recent cult hits _Disgaea_ and _Phantom Brave_, these games are trapped in the original PlayStation era. But as with those games, it doesn't matter, because the _Growlanser_ series has finely tuned gameplay and many distinct, creative touches.

Growlanser II begins like any straightforward strategy-RPG, with a tale of rapidly dissolving politics resulting in skirmishes between several kingdoms. Just like *Final Fantasy Tactics*, you move on a simple map screen, launching full-scale battles that intertwine with the plot.

But *Growlanser II*'s gameplay is much quicker and more exciting than *FFT*'s cold calculations. Units are speedy and can walk anywhere—no squares necessary. Actions take place in quick succession, but a deft menu system, which becomes second nature after an hour or two of play, keeps things from being overwhelming.

In fact, *Growlanser* thrives on mayhem. It's about building your characters and adding flourishes of technique as the battle rages, not carefully placing troops and planning the flow of battle meticulously. Essentially, it's a strategy game for those who are easily bored by strategy games.

What makes it engrossing is that the developers weren't content to simply create a technically accomplished battle system. The game makes clever use of stipulations (e.g., saving townsfolk) or battlefield conditions (like crumbling floors) to spice things up. Simply leveling your team up isn't enough to win—you have to play intelligently. A cast of likable characters and a suitable political yarn support the gameplay nicely.

Growlanser III has the same excellent battle mechanics. Though the developers kept the good stuff, it much more resembles a traditional RPG. *GL3* adds a dreary field map, deeply unnecessary random dungeons, and town sequences, which effectively muddy the waters.

GL2 might be on the short side, but it's 100 percent pure beef, *GL3* feels like cow eyeballs and kangaroo meat are mixed in—even if, in point of fact, the developers have actually *expanded* the game. Of all of the additions, the *Knights of the Old Republic*–style dialogue choices are the highlight. But either way, you're getting a pack of two immensely likable, if technologically primitive, games for the price of one, and that's a hard proposition to argue with.

_Christian Nutt

PUB WORKING DESIGNS — PRICE $49.99
DEV CAREER SOFT — PLAYERS 1
REL AVAILABLE NOW — ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR — WHO NEEDS LUNAR? 8/10

BETTER THAN FUTURE TACTICS
NOT AS GOOD AS FINAL FANTASY TACTICS (PS1)
WAIT FOR IT SHINING FORCE





BATEN KAITOS

ONE-WINGED MONGREL

TEEN | GC

Namco's partnership with _Xenosaga_'s Monolith Soft has transformed the publisher into an RPG contender, supplementing its _Tales_ series with more Square-like fare. In fact, _Baten Kaitos_ exhibits many of the characteristics that have made Square's games both great and popular...but there are problems, too.

These issues mainly stem from the fact that almost every element of the game is oversimplified. The story—young treasure hunter meets mysterious girl (with pendant), awakens dark god, incurs wrath of evil empire—is a mishmash of the mustiest clichés around, scraped straight from the bottom of the barrel.

Even so, it might have worked. But the story is told in slow and obvious chunks. Big plot points are often unoriginal, inconsistent, or coincidental, and almost always dull. Even worse, the characters lack personality—and the voice acting is simply awful. There's a shocking and original twist late in the game, but ultimately, it can't save things.

But it's not all disappointment. The game's use of collectible cards provides a flexible backbone for the battles, resulting in fast-paced fun. However, if you understand the obvious concept that bigger numbers mean higher damage, you're more than competent enough to excel at *Baten Kaitos* and free to ignore its deeper strategies.

In an interesting turn, your cards can change over time—fruit will rot and become poisonous, snow will melt into water, and a bamboo shoot will grow into a spear. It's exciting to see what will evolve, and more creative ideas like this could have made *Baten Kaitos* a fascinating game.

Yasuyuki Honne, art director from Square's distinctive PS1 hit *Chrono Cross*, handled the background graphics, and it's easy to tell. Though largely static, they frequently astound in their unusual, lush beauty. Unfortunately, unique visuals and a well-made battle system can't always rescue this easy linear game from the swell of mediocrity that often threatens to overrun it. Nice try; now let's see *Baten Kaitos II*.

_Christian Nutt



PUB NAMCO — PRICE $49.99
DEV MONOLITH SOFT — PLAYERS 1
REL AVAILABLE NOW — ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR — COMMON 6/10

BETTER THAN YU-GI-OH! WITH YOUR LI'L BRO
NOT AS GOOD AS PAPER MARIO THE THOUSAND-YEAR DOOR
WAIT FOR IT A NEW TALES GAME

"The alert level has been raised to RED!"

"Scored 9.0, 9.5 And 10 Out Of 10. Awarded Editor's Choice: Gold"
-Electronic Gaming Monthly

"MGS3 Looks Astounding, From Its Inspiration To Its Story To Its Gameplay."
-GameSpy.com

"5 Out Of 5"
-Official PlayStation Magazine

"10 Out Of 10"
-PlayStation Magazine

"The Finest Installment In Konami's Acclaimed Stealth-Espionage Series."
-Electronic Gaming Monthly

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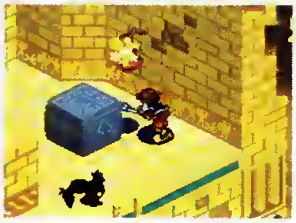
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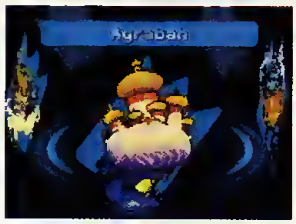




→ Though there's a lot of talk about card-based battles, in truth *Chain of Memories* isn't so far from the original *Kingdom Hearts*. While the attacks are governed by cards, it's still a hack-n-slash—a cool mix







KINGDOM HEARTS: CHAIN OF MEMORIES

BACKTRACK THROUGH THE BRAIN

EVERYONE | GBA

PUBLISHER	SQUARE ENIX
DEVELOPER	SQUARE ENIX/JUPITER
PRICE	$34.99
RELEASE	DECEMBER
PLAYERS	1
ORIGIN	JAPAN

Bridging the gap between the original *Kingdom Hearts* and its forthcoming sequel, *Chain of Memories* reunites you with Sora, Donald, and Goofy in a journey through, well, everywhere you've already been.

The game takes place in Castle Oblivion, an alternate dimension constructed from the memories of travelers. And the more they forget, the more they might remember. Yes, in typical Square fashion, the game's story is a mix of the usual enjoyable existential nonsense peppered with Disney cameos.

Despite the change of platform, *Chain of Memories* is shoehorned so perfectly into the middle of the series that it's clear the developers expected to attract its most fervent fans. Funny, then, that it retreads so much previously seen material. It even features the same levels as the original game, albeit done with 2D graphics.

The biggest change is the battle system. You've probably already heard that it's card based. For some reason, the mere mention of cards has most gamers running in terror, but in truth, the cards add a sorely needed element of strategy to the *Kingdom Hearts* button-mashing formula.

Cards, you see, are nothing to be afraid of, especially when they're as well balanced and intelligently integrated into the gameplay as they are in *Chain of Memories*. Shame it's such an easy game that the deeper strategies are easy to ignore—because if you were challenged, the game would be superb.

Would that it were consistent, though. The levels are repetitive, boxy mazes with nothing interesting in them aside from battles, and the story's for fans only. Still, it's a technically excellent and fun game that begins to wear only through repetition and ease.

_Christian Nutt

GMR BOXY **7/10**

BETTER THAN SWORD OF MANA
NOT AS GOOD AS GOLDEN SUN: THE LOST AGE
WAIT FOR IT: THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE MINISH CAP

2ND OPINION

Chain of Memories is the *Kingdom Hearts* you know and love but without the frustrating camera issues. Don't let the slightly confusing card system deter you. It's a great adventure with plenty of depth.

_Jeremy Parish
Features editor,
1UP.com

WWE SMACKDOWN! VS. RAW

LAYING IT DOWN ONCE AGAIN

TEEN | PS2

This year's *SmackDown!* comes out of the corner swinging (a steel chair, naturally) with improved graphics, new gameplay additions, and in a first for the series, an online mode.

Although *SmackDown!* does look good, it's what you'll hear that's more impressive. Every match has commentary that actually sounds like the announcers are watching the fight, and the superstars voice all the dialogue in career mode. The acting is hit or miss, but it goes hand in hand with the improved presentation, which does a fantastic job of simulating the WWE's style. In the ring, the new clean and dirty meters give players a bonus for playing nice or perpetrating dastardly deeds. This mechanic is a cool idea, but the meter takes too long to build up, and the payoff isn't really worth it (you either get a brief period of invincibility or the ability to punch your opponents in the groin).

All of the game's little additions are nice, but they don't really change the clunky and awkward combat that has always plagued the *SmackDown!* series. This means standard singles matches get old quickly, though the plethora of match types helps alleviate this problem. The biggest issue is that when more than three characters step into the ring, things become a mess, as the targeting system frequently has you staring down the referee instead of the 300-pound guy running at you with a sledgehammer.

The biggest new feature, online play, is both a happy surprise and a letdown. The mode runs super-smoothly, with the only hiccup being difficult timing during the Chop Battle minigame. Unfortunately, online mode is extremely limited, allowing only singles and bra-and-panties matches with no option for customization. Honestly, would it have been so hard to implement no-DQ matches and still run online? Online play has the seeds to be something great in later iterations of the series, but at the moment, it's nothing more than another kind of gimmick match. Still, this is the best of the numerous WWE-licensed games, and wrestling fans surely won't be disappointed.

_Joshua Cain

PUB THQ — PRICE $49.99
DEV YUKE'S — PLAYERS 1-2 (2-6 MULTITAP, 2 ONLINE)
REL AVAILABLE NOW — ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR CHAIR SHOT 8/10

BETTER THAN WWE DAY OF RECKONING
NOT AS GOOD AS DEF JAM FIGHT FOR NY
STILL NOT BETTER THAN WWF NO MERCY (N64)





RUMBLE ROSES

SHE LOVES ME NOT

MATURE | PS2

If the mildly rocking 1980s with its Poisons and Kip Wingers taught humanity anything at all, it was that every rose has its thorn. Just like every night has its dawn. Or perhaps how every cowboy sings a sad, sad song. And here's cowgirl Dixie Clemets' mournful lament: She's a very good girl in a very mediocre wrestling game. Konami's PlayStation 2–only *Rumble Roses* brings style aplenty, but it rarely stoops to substance and is easily surpassed by its videogame brethren.

Roses presents a novel and breastacular look at the world of women's wrestling. All the major female professions are represented here: twisted but sexy nurse, sassy robot, cowgirl, schoolgirl, and bondage queen. Its wholly unique contribution to the wrestling game genre is the Mad Mud Match, which is exactly like a regular match but fought in a messy brownish-gray soup.

All the effort here was put into making the rumbling roses gorgeous—and the result shows inside the ring. A bare-bones operation, *Roses* only allows for 1-on-1 contests and includes just a handful of venues in which to fight. There are only three match types, and incomprehensibly, saves are disabled during career mode, meaning players must finish a grappler's story in one sitting.

Special one-button attacks and "humiliations" can be unleashed after a series of successful moves, but they greatly unbalance play. When these attacks are activated, the game cuts to a prerendered movie (sometimes incongruous with the wrestlers' current positions) of some intricate wrestling hold being performed, such as when the game's final boss employs the Greco-Roman technique of shooting a missile at her opponents. All control is removed from players' hands, and oftentimes the match ends directly with a pinfall.

A throwaway yet oftentimes bizarrely incomprehensible story powers the career mode, and a perplexing A.I. that at times turns the female opponents into attack-reversing machines or makes them pause interminably between holds completes the package. Handle these roses with care.

_Greg Orlando



PUB KONAMI — PRICE $39.99
DEV KONAMI/YUKE'S — PLAYERS 1
REL AVAILABLE NOW — ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR WILTED 5/10

BETTER THAN BACKYARD WRESTLING
NOT AS GOOD AS WWE SMACKDOWN! VS. RAW
WAIT FOR IT: BACKYARD WRESTLING 2

→ *Ace Combat* has always set the standard for visual quality in the genre, and *AC5* pushes that envelope with great lighting, a frightening sense of height, and photo-realistic graphics. Woot!













→ Interaction with your wingmen is proactive in *Ace Combat 5*. Your squadron leader, for example, will occasionally ask questions, more often than not directed at you. At these junctions, a press of the D-pad will indicate a yes or no response, prompting an equal and opposite reaction from your captain. What this does is keep the player engrossed in the game, making for a really interactive experience. Do yourself a favor: Try this game with some good headphones on.

ACE COMBAT 5

IRON EAGLE

TEEN | PS2

PUBLISHER NAMCO
DEVELOPER NAMCO
PRICE $49.99
RELEASE AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN JAPAN

Since the PS1's early days, Namco's *Ace Combat* series has been the premier console flight-combat game, superior to both Konami's *AirForce Delta* and Sammy's *Lethal Skies* series. But as sophistication in game design advances, will *Ace Combat*'s arcade roots be its undoing?

Namco gave *Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War* a boost of Bruckheimer, necessary in a genre typically characterized by blandness. While not as overtly manga as *AirForce Delta Strike*, *Unsung War* puts personality at the forefront, wrapping the main character in a somber neopolitical plot. From the opening *Metal Gear Solid*–styled title sequence to the cut-scenes before the storm, pilots find themselves in the midst of what can best be described as a group effort. With three wingmen at your side, you can switch formations at the press of the D-pad (for covering, attack configurations, etc.), which allows for effective strategic decision making.

But beyond the crunch-time camaraderie lies a wealth of enhancements, such as the experience system that rewards players based on their marksmanship and efficiency. The better pilot you are, the broader your plane selection will be, both unlocked and purchased. Even more planes can be found if certain criteria are met, and *Unsung War* contains enough secrets to warrant multiple playthroughs.

Unsung War boasts ideal handling and control, near photo-realistic graphics, and digital surround sound. Where the game staggers is in its defiantly single-player focus, which is surprising given the involvement of your wingmen. A game like this begs at least some sort of multiplayer option. For the time being, all up-and-coming top guns need only apply solo.

_James Mielke

GMR ICEMAN **8/10**

BETTER THAN LETHAL SKIES II
LESS ARCADEY THAN CRIMSON SKIES
WAIT FOR IT. STAR FOX (GC)

2ND OPINION

No other flight-combat game matches this sequel's Department of Defense-endorsed visuals or raw sense of white-knuckle speed. Sure, the story's got some shaky spots—too much meaningless yapping! And where's the online multiplayer? Nevertheless, wannabe jet jocks will rack up the frequent-flier mileage.

_Crispin Boyer
Senior editor, *EGM*

CRASH 'N' BURN
PROCEED WITH CAUTION

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | 3.8

Eidos took a risky move in creating a new online racer based on emergent gameplay, but it just misses the checkered flag. Rather than include unique and interesting tracks, *Crash 'N' Burn* puts 16 cars on boring, standard tracks at the beginning of each and every race. Players must then steer around the vehicles and their debris when—not if—they crash, turning flaming steel, oil slicks, and shattered chassis into the main gameplay mechanic. Racing conventions like two-player head-to-head modes and time trials don't exist because 16 cars are required at all times. But the amount of cars leads to some rather creative variations on the racing theme: Kamikaze mode puts all the cars on a circular track and then orders eight to race in each direction, while last man standing mode is an all-out destruction derby.

Despite the huge number of modifications that can be made to a car, only changes to the engine, tires, and transmission affect gameplay—and there are only four different base cars to be modified. Dumping all of one's upgrade points into speed has such an effect that the other two can almost be overlooked.

Unfortunately, *Crash 'N' Burn* lacks elastic A.I. to keep the cars close together. A single mishap can give the CPU an insurmountable advantage, and there's nothing more frustrating than leading for an entire race only to be unavoidably broadsided at an intersection 10 feet from the finish. **_Doug Trueman**

PUB EIDOS
DEV CLIMAX
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $19.99
PLAYERS 1-16 (ONLINE)
ORIGIN U.K.

GMR BURNED 5/10

BETTER THAN BIG MUTHA TRUCKERS
NOT AS GOOD AS BURNOUT 3 TAKEDOWN
WAIT FOR IT MIDNIGHT CLUB 3 DUB EDITION









ATV OFFROAD FURY 3
DOWN AND DIRTY

EVERYONE | PS2

Sony's *ATV Offroad Fury* and its sequel were originally developed by Rainbow Studios, but the series has been passed to Climax. Despite the change in developers, the premise of the game is still the same: Hop on an ATV, modify it to your preference, then tear over sand, dirt, ice, snow, water, and mud.

Like the previous titles, *Fury 3* takes an over-the-top arcade approach to racing. Though the game allows minor tweaks to tires, suspension, and gear ratios, at the heart it's an off-road racer in which getting massive air and busting out tricks is more important than spending time in the garage. But that's not to say it's easy.

To win in *Fury*, players must master powersliding, suspension preloading, and airborne ATV manipulation. National tracks are particularly challenging, requiring multiple runs to learn where, when, and how far to jump. Supercross and Enduro tracks are more merciful, replacing technical expertise with a breakneck sense of speed and obstacles that range from open barn doors to a platoon of tanks on a mortar range. There's also an incredibly organic interaction with the environment, which can occasionally lead to utter fear: While another off-road game might simply have a player race downhill, the slopes in *Fury* are steep, treacherous, and unforgiving. No off-road title would be complete without an arsenal of suicidal tricks, and Climax has borrowed the *Tony Hawk* mechanic of linking air stunts with ground maneuvers.

In addition to the extensive single-player mode, *Fury* boasts six-player online racing with full support for clans and record times. There's even a waypoint editor so avid fans can create their own courses. Fast and frenetic, *ATV Offroad Fury 3* is a great title, so much so that we can forgive the occasional restart from behind an unmovable obstacle. **_Doug Trueman**





PUB SCEA
DEV CLIMAX
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $39.99
PLAYERS 1-4 (ONLINE)
ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR QUAD DAMAGE 8/10

ON PAR WITH: ATV OFFROAD FURY 2
BETTER THAN: ATV: QUAD POWER RACING 2
ALSO TRY: JEREMY MCGRATH SUPERCROSS WORLD

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

THE MIGHTY JUNGLE

MATURE | PS2

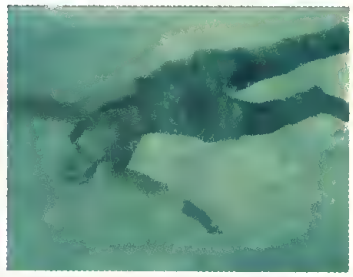
Hideo Kojima, as the suspicion goes, is mildly insane. This was learned from playing through *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*. Between the vampire that can walk on water, the unbelievable resurrection of Liquid Snake, Revolver Ocelot's extensive ties to the mysterious Patriots, the late-game antics of Rose and Col. Campbell, the true nature of the Big Shell mission, and, of course, the now-infamous character switch, there's far too much evidence in the Court of Crazy to avoid an acquittal. So it was only natural that prerelease theories regarding the content of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* involved similarly outlandish ideas (a favorite being that Solid Snake has somehow traveled back through time to take on the Soviet menace). But surprisingly, Mr. Kojima's third entry in his *MGS* trilogy rarely succumbs to absurdity, is much more evenly paced and mentally stable than *Sons of Liberty*, and plays to the strengths of its setting by adding new, relevant, and fun gameplay mechanics.

Much of this undoubtedly is due to the location and era in which *Snake Eater* takes place. We learn early on that pivotal Cold War events such as the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban missile crisis didn't exactly happen the way they were described in school textbooks, and through a series of events that aren't spoiled here, "Snake" is sent into the Soviet wilderness, a place that is far different than Shadow Moses and the Big Shell for three fundamental reasons: health, technology, and surroundings.

Regarding health, one of the major themes of *MGS3* is that of survival. "Snake Eater" is more than a subtitle, it's the main method of keeping Snake alive and well during the mission. Every action you perform requires stamina, and some are more grueling than others. When your stamina level drops, so does your performance. The way to stay energized is by living off the land: Snakes, spiders, crocodiles, birds, radioactive fungi...the jungle serves as a makeshift buffet. Keeping track of enemy positions and the movements of the Indian gavial might seem daunting, but the stamina system is set up so that it never really becomes a chore. Prey is bountiful in the outdoor environments, rations created from your kills can be equipped as items for use whenever necessary, and food can be kept for a while before it goes rotten and becomes diarrhea inducing.

But sustenance isn't the only wellness aspect that must be attended









GMR ESSENTIAL SELECTION





→ Interestingly, both Snake and Revolver Ocelot get beaten up, embarrassed, yelled at, or otherwise schooled multiple times during *MGS3*. But the dynamic of these two core *Metal Gear* characters is fascinating to watch, knowing what they'll eventually become. Oh, delicious dramatic irony.

to. Throughout the course of the game, Snake will sustain some fairly serious injuries that prevent his health bar from regenerating (this regeneration is the replacement for actual health rations). These injuries, ranging from small cuts to serious burns to actual broken bones, must be fixed with first-aid supplies before the healing can begin. Even though it takes a couple layers of menus to get to, it rarely becomes intrusive as you play—the end of a battle or when hiding in evasion mode is a good time to dig any bullets out. In conjunction with the food, this healing system provides a much more logical alternative to magical "rations" that simply replenish health. Fundamentally, it's somewhat unnecessary, but it goes a long way in reinforcing *Snake Eater*'s survival theme.

As do Snake's retroactive equipment and op-tech. Gone is the fancy Soliton radar system that allowed you to view not only where enemy soldiers were on the map, but also in what direction they were looking. In its place, Snake is given an assortment of tools (motion detector, directional microphone, thermal goggles) that, when used in concert with each other, make the lack of visible radar a nonissue. Weapons technology of the 1960s can also change the way the game is played—in particular, the tendency for pistol suppressors to deteriorate with repeated use. If a silent kill from long range isn't always possible, other options must be explored. This justifies the introduction of close-quarters combat (CQC), a hand-to-hand fighting style that greatly enhances Snake's short-range combat abilities and makes the simple holds and throws of the original *MGS* seem archaic. Snake is also given an additional trump card: camouflage. The ability to blend in with the surroundings is the third major facet of living in the jungle, and it is the most vital strategy when taking a stealthy approach. It is the best way to get out of trouble or to sneak through a heavily guarded area. The only problem is repeatedly having to go to a menu screen to change outfits and face paint, which can be a slight nuisance if the area offers different types of terrain.

The survival, technological, and camouflage aspects come together during one of *Snake Eater*'s highest points, the boss battle with The End. As if he was specifically justifying his decision to set the game in the jungle, Kojima took *MGS*' signature sniper battles and created an epic face-off that spans a large map and can actually take over an hour to complete by using sight, sound, cover, and elevation to track and hunt the prey. All of *Snake Eater*'s boss battles are exciting and fun, but this unique encounter marks the beginning of a series of truly excellent moments as the game accelerates wildly toward its conclusion, culminating in one of the greatest ending sequences in gaming and what's probably the most impressive display of the PlayStation 2's untapped graphical abilities.

Though the *Metal Gear* universe will certainly live on (Solid Snake still has some unfinished business), Hideo Kojima claims that *Snake Eater* is the last piece of the *Metal Gear Solid* trilogy. It's difficult to envision a better finale.

_Andrew Pfister

PUB KONAMI
DEV KCET
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $49.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR BOSS **10**/10

BETTER THAN SPY FICTION
ON PAR WITH METAL GEAR SOLID
WAIT FOR IT: SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY





→ 1964 Russian soldiers with 2004 American accents. A rare misstep in *MGS3*.

2ND OPINION

MGS3 revisits the gripping storytelling of *MGS1*, mixing it with highly evolved stealth gameplay that goes even deeper than anything in *MGS2*. Expect phenomenal visuals, unbelievable boss battles, and the longest Solid Snake adventure yet.

_Shane Bettenhausen
Previews editor, *EGM*



[SPOILER WARNING!]

THE END IS THE BEGINNING IS THE END

Beware of spoilers! As alluded to in the review, facing off against The End marks the beginning of *Snake Eater*'s third act. It's the point where everything starts to come together, both in terms of the plot and gameplay. The concept seems simple enough: The elderly sniper hides in the jungle, waiting for Snake to pop his head out so that he may pop it off with a squeeze of the trigger. Snake must use his own camouflage and equipment to figure out where The End is waiting and then flush him out into the open. But Kojima stretches this battle over multiple map segments, each featuring its own style and terrain elevations, which provide The End with numerous sniper spots.

In order to find him, you'll have to use a combination of your directional microphone (it picks up his breathing, and he'll taunt you every once in a while), thermal goggles (when you get him to run, he leaves footprints in the mud that betray his heading), and AP sensor (which trembles when you're close to another life-form). The battle is slow and methodical, but there's still a sense of urgency attached: If either of the two combatants runs out of stamina, the battle is over and Snake wakes up incarcerated in a local enemy base. It's by far the most unique boss fight in the *MGS* series...that is, until you encounter The Sorrow. A boss battle that doesn't involve a single shot being fired, and the true enemy turns out to be...well, we'll let you figure that out.




In search of
ancient secrets,
they will find
an unstoppable foe.
XBOX
BUNGIE
XBOX LIVE
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Violence
Language
halo2.com


HALO 2
Earth Will Never Be The Same

TRIBES: VENGEANCE

THE TRIBE HAS SPOKEN

TEEN | PC

Most gamers know about the *Half-Life*s, *Quake*s, *Doom*s, and *Halo*s, but truly hardcore contingents also fondly remember *Tribes*. Combining jetpacks, power armor, CTF, big outdoor maps, and excessive Internet verbiage, *Tribes* gained a well-earned cult following despite the controversial release of *Tribes 2* years later. Since the original *Tribes* developer is sadly no longer around, the certainly capable crew over at Irrational (*System Shock 2*, *Freedom Force*) has taken over.



Irrational's biggest contribution to the *Tribes* series is a single-player campaign with an actual story. Much more than the expected "go kill people who ain't you" missions, *Vengeance* tells a grandiose (around 18 chapters) space opera full of political intrigue, family strife, and arguing persons who eventually get over their differences. Sure, the acting and script occasionally get hokey, but overall, the story is a lot better than expected. Also, it's told from multiple perspectives—each chapter shifts characters, and you'll find yourself playing as a spoiled princess, a star athlete, a slick assassin, and even a fleeing 6-year-old. These perspective changes keep the already-interesting story even fresher. The only notable flaws are an incredibly difficult/annoying chapter in which you have to undergo "initiation" tests (which feel more like busywork than galactic intrigue) and level design that is a bit on the simplistic side.

The story also serves as a multiplayer tutorial. Each chapter slowly introduces more gameplay concepts. The first few teach you how to move, then you're introduced to new items and functions.

Vengeance offers a more simplified, newbie-friendly version of traditional *Tribes* gameplay. You still use jetpacks, teamwork, and overall skill to capture flags—except the weapons are tuned differently, the complex sensor network is streamlined, and it's easy to get around even in heavy armor. The maps aren't as sprawling, and the vehicles are toned down as well (additionally, they merely respawn rather than require points to purchase them). *Tribes* newbies can quickly learn the game, but since hardcore veterans have already honed their skills on the harder previous games, they will "pwn" you mercilessly if you accidentally find yourself on their server. Be warned that your online experience can range from enjoyable to frustrating due entirely to the other players involved.

While the streamlined gameplay might irk veterans, the overall package of solid single player plus fast-n-easy multiplayer is still a good one for newbies and aficionados alike.

_Thierry Nguyen

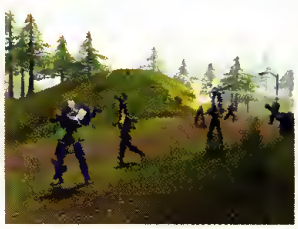
PUB	VIVENDI UNIVERSAL	PRICE	$49.99
DEV	IRRATIONAL GAMES	PLAYERS	1-32 (ONLINE)
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	AUSTRALIA

GMR TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY **7/10**

BETTER THAN TRIBES 2
NOT AS GOOD AS TRIBES
ON PAR WITH UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004







2ND OPINION

I love this game. Well, really, it's two games in one box. There's a decent single-player story, but the multiplayer rocks. The problem is that there's no ample preparing for those who await you online. Would it have killed them to include some bots for training maps?

_Darren Gladstone
Senior editor *CGW*


Devil may cry 3
DANTE'S AWAKENING
March 2005
devilmaycry.com
RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.
PlayStation.2
CAPCOM
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FUZION
THE NEW FRAGRANCE FOR MEN
ALWAYS LEAVE AN IMPRESSION

PlayStation 2

ATV Offroad Fury 3

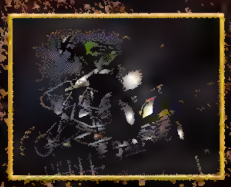
BLAZE YOUR OWN TRAIL™











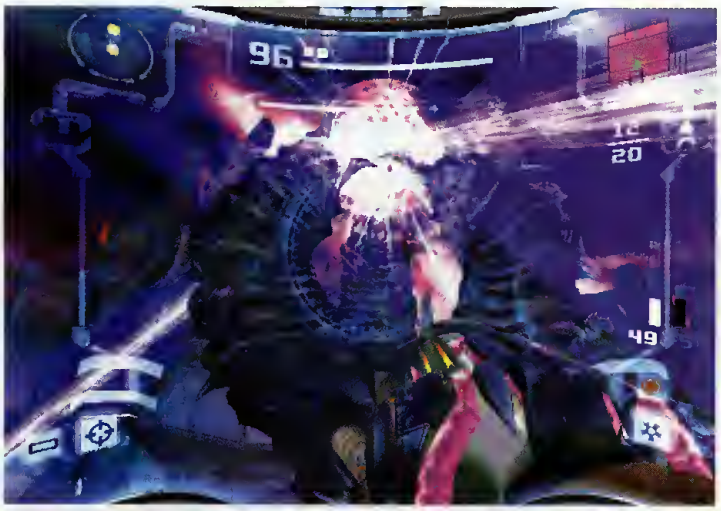
Forget boundaries. With 30 massive, free-roaming environments, 36 unbelievably sick aerial moves, 6 gnarly off-road terrains and an online mode that lets you and up to 6 buddies tear Mother Nature a new one, it's the ultimate four-wheeled free-for-all.

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.™

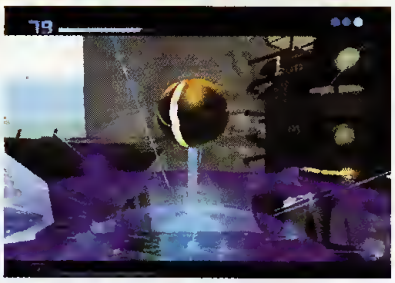
EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Lyrics

ONLINE
BROADBAND AND DIAL-UP

Online play requires Internet connection, Network Adaptor (for PlayStation 2) and Memory Card (8MB) (for PlayStation 2) (each sold separately). Online icon is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. ATV Offroad Fury is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. ©2004 Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Developed by Climax Group Inc. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. "Live In Your World. Play In Ours." is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. "Blaze your own trail." is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. George Nelson Bubble Lamps are a product of Modernica Inc.











→ The dark visor is essentially the X-ray visor from the first *Metroid Prime*—it allows you to see and lock onto the dark-fused enemies who would normally disappear and run circles around you.

METROID PRIME 2: ECHOES

HELLO...ELL-O...EL-O...

TEEN | GC

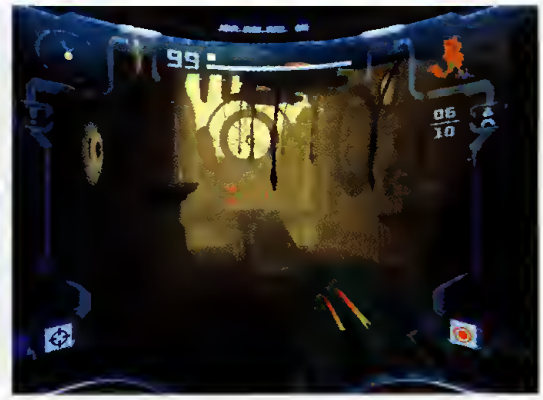
PUBLISHER NINTENDO
DEVELOPER RETRO STUDIOS
PRICE $49.99
RELEASE AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS 1-4
ORIGIN U.S.A.

It wasn't a fluke: Americans can in fact make good *Metroid* games. Not only that, they can mess around with the main game mechanics, nearly eliminate the presence of actual metroids, and tack on a superfluous multiplayer mode...and still make a good *Metroid* game. But if you mess with a recipe too much, the results are going to taste a little different.

The greatest satisfaction derived from *Metroid* games is finally being able to go to places that you were previously denied access. Yes, having Samus lose all of her gear at the beginning of each adventure is now cliché, but puzzles designed around recovering and then utilizing abilities are far more compelling than puzzles existing just for the sake of having puzzles. The difference with *Echoes* is that the natural progression of this item recovery is not nearly as obvious as in previous *Metroid* games. Even with the in-game hint system turned on, figuring out the next move requires a good memory and a great deal of time. It's a judgment call: Some will see this as inelegant design, others will appreciate the ramped-up challenge. What needs to be scrapped completely, however, is yet another unnecessary scavenger hunt. Each temple requires three keys that are found on the dark side; these are not a problem, as there are puzzles designed around them. But the nine extra keys scattered about the entire world, similar to the Chozo artifacts in the first *Prime*, serve no purpose other than to artificially extend the game's hour count, and their relevance to the plot is never explained beyond "you need these to enter the temple." Nintendo, stop doing this.

Even without the extra key hunting, *Echoes* is a fairly lengthy game, which is surprising considering that it feels much smaller and more compact than previous *Metroid* locales. There are three major areas, each with its own dark variation. The dimension-hopping works quite well, and as expected, the puzzles that involve manipulating one side in order to change the other are fun and oftentimes challenging. The worlds







→ A weapon upgrade found later in the game gives you the ability to lock your missiles onto multiple targets, which really comes in handy for specially locked doors and a couple difficult boss fights.

[MULTIPLAYER]
NOT IN THE HUNT

Multiplayer in *MP2*: splitscreen, offline, and only two modes. Strikes one, two, and three...right? When compared to everything else that's available this year on the multiplayer front (what's up, *Halo 2*), definitely. If we were to look only at the GameCube's lineup, though, it's actually not that bad. Four friends on the couch trading blaster fire and insults involving mothers is a tradition that goes back to the N64's *GoldenEye*. But even Rare's shooter offered far more options than what's found in *Echoes*, so it's hard to think of multiplayer as anything but an afterthought. Those hoping for something more might turn their attention to the upcoming *Metroid Prime: Hunters* for the DS.



themselves are beautiful and feel much more "alive" than *Prime*'s Tallon IV. But while Aether, the luminoth, and the ing are excellent and fitting additions to the *Metroid* universe, the severe lack of actual metroids makes *Echoes* feel more like a side story.

In place of the metroids are some very cool and seriously tough enemies. Boss battles are especially difficult, as they all have multiple stages that require different strategies. Impressive as they may be, they have the unfortunate effect of exposing the *Prime* series' control scheme as not entirely optimal. Nintendo likes to describe the games as "first-person adventures," and for the majority of the game—the standard *Metroid* exploration and light combat stuff—the lock-on scheme suffices. But there are definitely times when *Echoes* requires the same fast maneuvering and viewing angles one needs in an action-based first-person shooter. Designing boss fights that highlight maneuverability deficiencies perhaps isn't the most convincing argument against customizable controls.

However, two of the more annoying aspects of *Metroid Prime* have been reworked for the better: Beam switching has been toned down from the four beams used to dispatch color-coded space pirates, and scanning now employs its own color-coding system to cut down on unnecessary scans.

Metroid Prime 2: Echoes is an excellent game with brilliant art direction and tried-and-true gameplay. But whether it's because of the compactly designed world of Aether, the unfamiliar characters and story elements, or the lack of the first 3D *Metroid*'s visual impact, *Prime 2* feels slightly less powerful than its predecessor. Fitting, considering the nature of an echo.

_Andrew Pfister

GMR SOUNDS GOOD **9/10**

BETTER THAN DOOM 3
NOT AS GOOD AS METROID PRIME
WAIT FOR IT HALF-LIFE 2

2ND OPINION

Improving on the genre-redefining *Prime* proves to be a tad difficult, but *Echoes* tries very hard to separate itself from its predecessor by including a dualistic world, trickier difficulty, and weird new weapons. It's still awesome, but the whole endeavor feels a tad short and repetitive

_Shane Bettenhausen
Previews editor, *EGM*

KOHAN II: KINGS OF WAR

ONCE MORE, SAME FEELING

TEEN | PC

The *Kohan* series exemplifies the maxim "more isn't always better." While many RTS games focus on being big and complicated, *Kohan* reduces your management headaches and delivers a solid RTS that emphasizes strategic decision making instead of clickfests.

Like the first *Kohan*, *Kings of War* doesn't utilize RTS staples like peons, mining, and mobs of several hundred units. On each map are several settlement points on which to build cities. Each city has a limited number of slots for economic buildings that produce stone, wood, metal, mana, or gold. Units consume the first four resources and are purchased with the fifth one, so economic decisions are based on managing production rather than memorizing how many miners to build. Beyond production, cities also provide militias and a "supply zone" where units regenerate health.

Unit production isn't so much simplified as it is downsized. You only get about 20 units a game, and they're all "companies" consisting of frontline, flanking, and support units. The units you include can be anything from swordsmen to rangers to mages, and their abilities combine with those of the other units to determine the company's effectiveness.

Kings of War has the usual generic story about evils unleashed and the heroes who set out to defeat them. As befitting a fantasy game, there are elves, dwarves, barbarians (under different names of course), and undead—six races in all rather than the original's two. In the 25-mission single-player campaign, you learn how to play them all—but it's definitely not the single player that makes *Kohan* special.

The multiplayer gameplay is deeper and far richer than that in most other titles in the genre. Due to the simplicity of the economic system, players can concentrate on battles, which often involve a lot of thrusts and parries around important cities, and during these fights, the advantage will seesaw back and forth. *Kings of War* also allows players to work together as a team and cooperate by exchanging cities in order to take advantage of the different races' abilities.

Despite the lack of dazzling graphics or a riveting single-player game, *Kings of War* is a refreshingly entertaining game that gives players a break from RTS conventions. ■

_Di Luo

PUB GLOBAL STAR
DEV TIMEGATE STUDIOS
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $39.99
PLAYERS 1-8 (ONLINE)
ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR 8/10 PEON-FREE!

BETTER THAN: WARCRAFT III
NOT AS GOOD AS: ROME: TOTAL WAR
WAIT FOR IT: LORD OF THE RINGS: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH





FINAL FANTASY I & II: DAWN OF SOULS

ENTER BAHAMUT

EVERYONE | GBA

Veteran gamers will feel even more antiquated when they realize that Square's landmark roleplayer *Final Fantasy* first graced the old-school Nintendo Entertainment System some 15 years ago. Back then, guiding a heroic party of your own design through epic dungeons, hacking through scores of turn-based battles, and gliding through the air in a nifty airship were positively groundbreaking. Eleven games later, the *FF* trademarks still work (although with an ample addition of moody girly-men and ostentatious CG cut-scenes), but it's refreshing to look back on the genesis of the world's most popular RPG franchise.

Old-timers seeking a nostalgic buzz are in for a treat: *Dawn of Souls* lavishly repackages the first two *Final Fantasy* titles, gussying up the visuals, remixing the sound, grafting on a ton of new content, and attempting to fix any broken bits left over from olden times.

Of the two games bundled together here, the original *Final Fantasy* easily bests its own sequel. Although it's woefully light on plot, the free party-forming dynamic rules: You create a group of four warriors, assigning each member one of six possible jobs. Whether you decide to forge a balanced group of fighters and mages, barrel through with all physical characters, or risk death with a quartet of underpowered black mages totally alters the flow of your gameplay experience (and encourages replay). Gameplay itself is fast and fun, with oodles of dungeons to tackle, spells to learn, equipment to plunder, and bosses to fell. The nicely reworked visuals and music also make this the best-looking version to date (sorry, PS1). What really pushes *FF* over the edge of quality, however, are the four all-new dungeons (one of them 40 floors deep) packed with new items, monsters, and a total of 16 new bosses...all borrowed from later *FF* games like *IV*, *V*, and *VI*. Spectacular stuff, really.

Final Fantasy II, though...not quite so spectacular. Although this is the finest remake yet—offering snazzier looks and sounds and its own all-new miniscenario—it's still plagued by a fundamentally busted experience system that encourages you to attack your own party members in order to beef them up. Truly bizarre. It's still worth your time, of course...but be sure to play the superior *FF* first. ■

_Shane Bettenhausen

PUB NINTENDO
DEV SQUARE ENIX
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $29.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN JAPAN

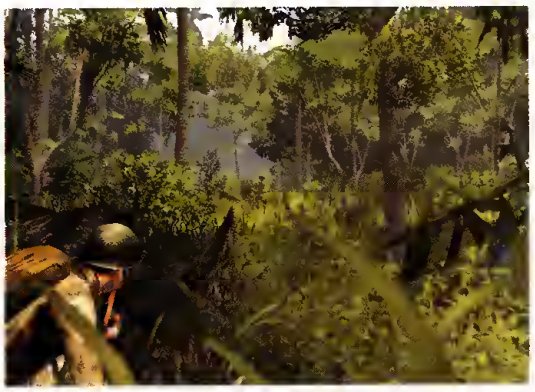
GMR 9/10 PRELUDE

BETTER THAN: THE GOLDEN SUN GAMES
NOT AS GOOD AS: FINAL FANTASY IV (SUPER NINTENDO)
WAIT FOR IT: FINAL FANTASY III FOR DS





→ Finally, a game about World War II.









MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT

WE WILL FIGHT THEM ON THE BEACHES

TEEN | PC

PUBLISHER	ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPER	EA LA
PRICE	$49.99
RELEASE	AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS	1-32 (ONLINE)
ORIGIN	U.S.A.

Considering all the emphasis the World War II genre puts on shooting Nazis, it's easy to forget that there was a whole other side to the conflict. But where *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun* failed to make a compelling game out of the Pacific theater, *Pacific Assault* succeeds. With a tone that's closer to the recent spate of Vietnam shooters, *Pacific Assault* casts players as a melancholy Marine and sets them loose to battle the Japanese in dense tropical jungles.

There's a spectacular Pearl Harbor sequence, and it's far more epic than *Rising Sun*'s version. But after that, it's off to places like Makin Atoll and Guadalcanal, where you'll creep through the foliage, storm Japanese camps, and generally blow stuff up.

This time, though, you're not an army of one; real soldiers fight in groups, and so will you. Sometimes you'll issue simple commands to small crowds of Marines, but mostly you'll follow the same guys you trained with in boot camp. More than just helper A.I., your buddies will give orders, shout warnings, and watch your back. They're also your only hope if you're gunned down; as you lie bleeding, your medic will try to get you up and running again.

All this help is a good thing. You'll often face overwhelming odds, and your opponents are skilled at taking cover, using camouflage, and aiming at your face. Covering fire from your squadmates makes a huge difference, especially if you're rescuing a wounded soldier or sneaking behind a tank to set a satchel charge.

There are a few places where the game falls short, but excellent A.I., solid gameplay, and fairly deep multiplayer battles make *Pacific Assault* worthy of the *Medal of Honor* name.

_Mikel Reparaz

GMR BANZAI! **9/10**

BETTER THAN MOH: RISING SUN
ON PAR WITH: CALL OF DUTY
WAIT FOR IT: MOH: OGGS OF WAR

2ND OPINION

It is official. We've run out of digitized Nazis to kill. *Medal of Honor*'s move to the Pacific delivers more of the tense action I crave. I just wish that I wasn't still being led down a tarted-up corridor. If the next *MOH* provides some better level design, I'll be a very happy soldier.

_Darren Gladstone
Senior editor, *CGW*





FIGHT CLUB

I AM JACK'S BROKEN GAME

MATURE | XB [REVIEWED] | PS2

To make a game of *Fight Club*, one has to reject the film's ideals. But that's forgivable. Even if the concept is flawed, it's hard to deny the allure of the movie's brutal fight scenes. A *Fight Club* game could have been fantastic.

In some ways, it is. The backgrounds are great-looking re-creations of locations from the film, for example. The music—some straight from the movie—brings back that buzz-saw intensity. Most fighting games are fanciful; *Fight Club* is dirty.

But problems seep in quickly. The movie, you'll recall, essentially revolves around two characters: Jack and Tyler. Big-breasted Bob aside, the roster is filled out with characters who barely had lines. And yeah, beating the crap out of Fred Durst is pleasant, but it doesn't justify his presence here.

The story mode is laughably inept and completely misses the mark—and the film's message. The big crime, though, is that the game really has only three characters. When you make your own character for online fighting, you can pick from three types: brawler, grappler, and martial artist.

Each of the preexisting characters in *Fight Club* also falls into one of these three templates. This just about kills any long-term value the game has. *Soul Calibur II*, *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution*, and *Dead or Alive 3* are all part of their systems' $20 bargain lines now; any one of them will last you infinitely longer.

The sad truth, though, is that the developers clearly understand how to make a good fighting game—they just didn't have enough time to do it. The gameplay basics are extremely solid. The online mode works well and has some original ideas, but with *Dead or Alive Ultimate* and *Mortal Kombat: Deception*, does anyone need it? In 2004, it's just too late for a half-assed first try. *Fight Club* falls flat.

_Christian Nutt

PUB VIVENDI UNIVERSAL | PRICE $49.99
DEV GENUINE GAMES | PLAYERS 1-2
REL NOVEMBER | ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR BEAT 4/10

BETTER THAN: TAO FENG
NOT AS GOOD AS: DEF JAM FIGHT FOR NY
WAIT FOR IT: TEKKEN 5

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2005

ACTUAL DRIVING TALENT REQUIRED

EVERYONE | XB

Did you like *RalliSport Challenge 2* for the Xbox? Have you even heard of *RalliSport Challenge 2* for the Xbox? It's all right if you haven't—despite its fun arcade racing and a visual package that makes *Gran Turismo* look like *Night Driver* for the Atari 2600, the game's Euro-rally theme just isn't the sort of thing that builds excitement among the NASCAR generation.

That's why it's odd to see a new game in the *Colin McRae* series—one created almost exclusively for British rally maniacs—hit the U.S. so soon. If you played *Colin 04*, you'll find *2005* to be suspiciously similar in many ways: A good half of the tracks are recycled content, and the career mode, while much more forgiving than *Colin 04*'s beat-this-race-or-die-trying scheme, still lacks the smooth difficulty curve seen in *RalliSport 2*.

So why would anyone want to play this instead of *RalliSport*? The difference between the two is all in the race experience—if Microsoft's title is a game, then *Colin* is a full-on simulation that punishes poor driving and rewards the hours of effort required to pull off a clean run in every event. The graphics are also a night-and-day improvement over the last entry—this is the first *Colin* to include real weather, real shadows, and lots of other little atmospheric effects taken for granted in other racers. The audience for a hardcore niche racer like this one is miniscule, it's true, but if you found *RalliSport 2* addictive, think of *Colin 2005* as the same game with the difficulty switched over to "realistic."

_Kevin Gifford

PUB CODEMASTERS | PRICE $29.99
DEV CODEMASTERS | PLAYERS 1-8
REL AVAILABLE NOW | ORIGIN U.K.

GMR MCRAD 8/10

JUST A BIT BETTER THAN: COLIN 04
NOT AS GOOD AS: RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2
WAIT FOR IT: SEGA RALLY 2005



→ The *Colin McRae* series has always skewed toward the sim fans, and this year's installment is no exception. It's punishing and unforgiving in that special way that only rally fans can appreciate. But the most notable improvement over *04* is the visual overhaul. Screens are nice, but it's better in motion.





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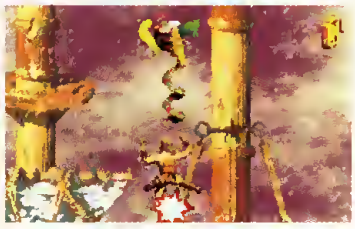
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DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2

BANANAS AT A RIPE OLD AGE

EVERYONE | GBA

To call the GBA a Nintendo port machine would be unfair...unless, of course, you were talking about platformers. Then it'd be totally obvious. Compare the four *Super Mario Advance* games, a *Kirby* remake, and now two out of the three SNES *Donkey Kong Country*s to the GBA original *Wario Land 4* and, uh...that's about it. *Donkey Kong Country 2* continues the hallowed Nintendo tradition of rereleasing a game with negligible enhancements and watching the company money tree grow strong like an oak.

The good news is that most of Nintendo's SNES platformers are really good, and *DKC2* is arguably the best in the series. The character difference between Diddy and Dixie Kong is more significant than *DKC*'s tag team of Donkey and Diddy, and *DKC2*'s levels are better designed and better looking. But underneath the plastic graphics and googly-eyed characters, the game still lacks the "soul" that was present in games like *Yoshi's Island*. The extra stuff is basically the same as what was added to the first *DKC* port on the GBA: minigames and races that aren't worth much more than a curious playthrough. Good for boredom, bad for creativity.

_Andrew Pfister

PUB NINTENDO
DEV RARE/NINTENDO
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $29.99
PLAYERS 1-2
ORIGIN U.K.

GMR CHIQUITA 7/10

BETTER THAN DONKEY KONG COUNTRY
NOT AS GOOD AS SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 1-4
WAIT FOR IT SUPER PRINCESS PEACH (DS)

CAPCOM FIGHTING EVOLUTION

OFFENSIVE ASSAULT

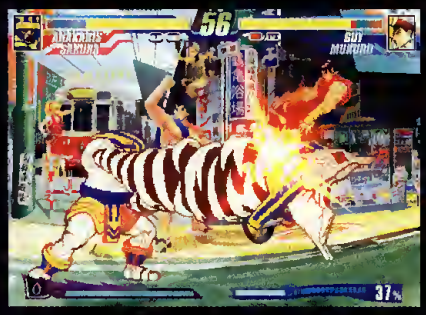
TEEN | PS2

It's hard to tell what Capcom's trying to achieve here. *Capcom Fighting Evolution* is not, even in the loosest of terms, an evolution. Presented here as a sort of "greatest-hits" cast of characters from many of its famous 2D fighting games, *Evolution* offers an odd melange of pugilists apparently tossed in a can and shaken out at random. Ryu and Guile from *Street Fighter II*; Demetri and Felicia from *Darkstalkers*; the *SF3* big-hipped version of Chun-Li; Guy and Sakura from *Street Fighter Alpha*; and even Kenji, Hydron, and Hauzer from little-known CPSIII fighter *Red Earth* are available, plus others. While this may at first seem like a great way to pit all of Capcom's best fighters against each other, in reality it makes for an unbalanced mess.

Take a hyperfast character like *SF3*'s Yun and put him up against a slower, more ridiculous novelty character like *Red Earth*'s T-Rex-inspired Hauzer, for example. The result? Absolute destruction. While Hauzer's big-time attacks may be fun to watch, in actual play, they're useless. Plus, characters like Anakaris and the end-boss, *Darkstalker*'s Pyron, are insanely cheap to play against. And the concept of picking two characters to strategically pit against the CPU (or live opponent) only works when you know who you're playing against, which isn't normally the case.

Dear Capcom, it's time to redraw those old-ass sprites you've been using since 1995. *Evolution* doesn't have the beautifully animated characters of *Street Fighter III*, or the sharp 3D backgrounds of *Marvel vs. Street Fighter 2*, or the high-res character art of Arc's *Guilty Gear Isuka*. With precious few other play options built in, *Evolution* adds up to a whole lot of nothing for anyone but the most devoted Capcom fan.

_James Mielke



PUB CAPCOM
DEV CAPCOM
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $29.99
PLAYERS 1-2
ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR ROTTEN IN DENMARK 3/10

BETTER THAN: STAPLING YOUR FEET TO THE GROUND
NOT NEARLY AS GOOD AS STREET FIGHTER III
ALSO TRY: GUILTY GEAR ISUKA

SAMURAI WARRIORS XL

XACTLY WHAT YOU'D XPECT

TEEN | PS2

You had to see it coming. Just as with *Dynasty Warriors 3* and *4*, Koei has followed up *Samurai Warriors*—its feudal-Japanese flavored take on Musou madness—with an *Xtreme Legends* expansion pack that both supplements the original title and serves as a game in itself. It's the least necessary one yet.

Four new playable characters enter the scene, but that's pretty much all you get in terms of worthwhile new content for *Samuari XL*—everything else pretty much defines the word "negligible." There are two new difficulty levels (because you demanded Novice!), a new sixth weapon (which you won't likely even get until you've cleared the entire game), three new versus modes (look out, *Soul Calibur II*!), and a bunch of other things you'd identify as new only because it says so on the box.

That said, the four new characters do include two of the best in any *Warriors* game yet—the total badass Tadakatsu Honda and his archer of a daughter, Ina—and the fast-paced hack-n-slash gameplay remains as addictive as ever. One has to wonder, though: With only 15 characters in the original *Samurai* (far fewer than *Dynasty 4*'s 43), why couldn't *Samurai XL*'s four have been added to it? It's almost as if Koei planned this expansion pack long ago just to milk *Warriors* fans for all they're worth. But you didn't do that...did you, Koei?

_Chris Baker





PUB KOEI
DEV OMEGA FORCE
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $29.99
PLAYERS 1-2
ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR UNNECESSARY 6/10

NOT AS GOOD AS DYNASTY WARRIORS 4: EMPIRES
ON PAR WITH DYNASTY WARRIORS 3: XL
WAIT FOR IT SAMURAI WARRIORS: EMPIRES (IT HAS TO HAPPEN!)





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EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Violence

989 SPORTS — PlayStation.2 — LIVE IN YOUR WORLD. PLAY IN OURS.

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SCRAPLAND

RISE OF THE ROBOTS

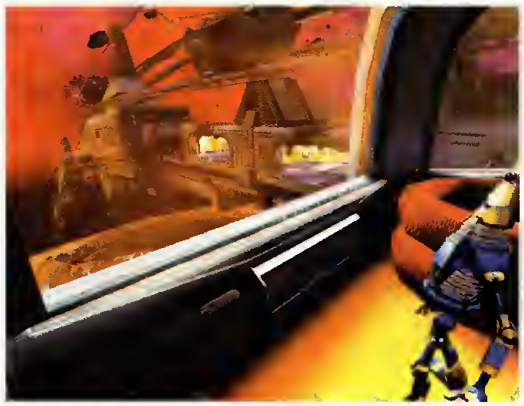
TEEN | PC

Say what you will about American McGee's slightly suspicious endorsement of this underdog game, but one thing *Scrapland* proves is that the man has good—if not quirky—taste in games. Although it's uncertain what the value of his brand name will bring to this Euro underdog (McGee's last game, *Alice*, came out nearly four years ago), *Scrapland*'s gorgeous set pieces and unique take on *Grand Theft Auto*'s open-ended gameplay makes it one of PC gaming's best-kept secrets.

The game's character-swapping conceit makes up for the entirety of *Scrapland*'s on-foot segments and opens up many of the missions to player improvisation. Although some robots are better suited than others for any one mission, your range of choices is a refreshing change from the staid linearism of other third-person shooters. Tempering the balance of this ability is the fact that cloning is illegal in *Scrapland*—meaning your out-of-body stint is constantly one of tension, evasion, and combat against relentless police-bots. And that's only half the battle. The city itself is open to exploration via gunships that you build and customize. Inevitably, vehicular battles break out with predictable regularity. To the game's credit, dueling with opponents in your ship is both fun and chaotic—the game's straightforward keyboard and mouse control scheme makes *Scrapland*'s high-octane dogfights feel more like twitchy deathmatches.

Despite its immediate gameplay strengths and hypnotically good graphics (just cruising around town gives you a real sense of majesty and scale), *Scrapland* isn't without its missteps. What could have been a real story with intriguing mystery and distinguished characters becomes nothing more than a loose excuse for you to grab this and blast that. After about 10 hours of fetching and kicking ass, you wonder if there's really any point to all of these errands. Still, *Scrapland* exudes a refreshing naiveté that's at odds with the majority of macabre gaming—you simply can't help but take its hokey jokes at face value and openly embrace its delicious absurdity.

_Che Chou





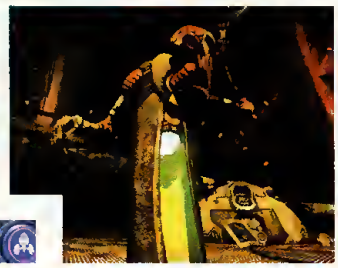
→ The game is actually being pitched as *American McGee Presents Scrapland*, in the hopes that Mr. McGee's unusual but recognizable name piques the interest of PC gamers.



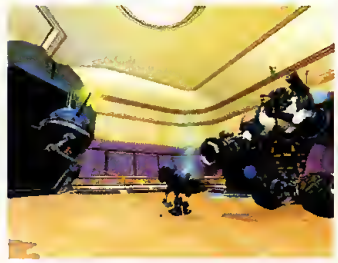
2ND OPINION

So quirky it's cool. Robots spaceships a *Beyond Good and Evil*-meets-film noir vibe. What's not to dig? The bugs and some off translations it ain't perfect, and this dark horse title is coming out during a busy holiday season, but don't miss out on *Scrapland*.

_Darren Gladstone
Senior editor, *CGW*







PUB ENLIGHT
DEV MERCURY STEAM
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE TBD
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN SPAIN

GMR USA! **8/10**

BRIGHTER THAN: AMERICAN MCGEE'S ALICE
NOT AS WITTY AS: GRIM FANDANGO
WAIT FOR IT: PSYCHONAUTS



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TY 2: BUSH RESCUE

THE ORIGINAL AUSSIE IS BACK

EVERYONE | XB [REVIEWED] | GC | PS2

The last time *Ty the Tasmanian Tiger* appeared, he didn't set the platforming genre on fire. In fact, no one noticed he showed up to the party. Plenty of mascot platformers have already come out this year, but Electronic Arts and Krome Studios still released a second game featuring the boomerang-wielding Australian native.

The hub-based gameplay of the original title is gone; instead, the sequel follows the popular trend of incorporating the open-ended elements of the *Grand Theft Auto* series into other genres. Don't expect to hook up with any Australian hookers, though. In *Ty 2*, Boss Cass has escaped, and in response, the Bush Rescue headquarters is established. Locals can submit help requests through Bush Rescue, and these requests make up the missions assigned to Ty. These missions usually involve Ty rescuing someone from danger and quickly become tiresome, but many simple minigames and the exciting story-based levels provide a welcome break from fighting Boss Cass' minions.

The central "outback" map of *Ty 2* is enormous, which works for the game in good and bad ways. There's plenty of road to cruise while picking up crystals, but counterproductive to this fun are the boring and repetitive environments. Much worse, however, is the frustrating map. Once enough missions have been completed, the game strangely assumes players have memorized the location of the Bush Rescue headquarters and leaves no marker on the map. Spending more than 20 minutes aimlessly wandering near previous mission locations in search of the headquarters is far from enjoyable, and it's unclear how a younger gamer would deal with this problem.

It's difficult to describe any element of the game as anything but simply "good." Difficulty controlling the dual boomerangs, poor implementation of new weapon options, and confusing mission goals are tiny complaints when considering *Ty 2* brings a little bit of everything to the table and manages it well. EA was smart to release the game at a budget-level price; even though *Ty 2* is far from a blockbuster title, it's still a competent platformer that's available at a great price.

_Patrick Klepek



PUB ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEV KROME STUDIOS
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $19.99
PLAYERS 1-4
ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR CRIKEY! 6/10

BETTER THAN: MANY HIGHER-PRICED GAMES
NOT AS GOOD AS: SLY COOPER 2
DON'T FORGET: YOUR MAP





BLOODRAYNE 2

BLOOD BANK OVERDRAWN

MATURE | XB [REVIEWED] | PS2

"Fake Burst Cunningly Distorted" and "Whack Lick Erotic Cunningly" are cheat codes for unlocking juggy mode (inflate and deflate Rayne's breasts) and alternate costumes (like a schoolgirl outfit) in *BloodRayne 2*. They present a good idea of what to expect from the follow-up to Terminal Reality's sleeper hit.

Rayne returns as the exceedingly sexy and provocative female vampire hell-bent on revenge. However, her combat has undergone a needed overhaul, leaving her with an extensive assortment of battle options for a seemingly infinite number of combinations. Gamers can execute brutal fatalities from the front and back of enemies, utilize dozens of punch and kick combos, toss enemies like rag dolls with Rayne's metallic whip, ride down railings while firing blood bullets, regenerate health by sucking blood...yep, it's definitely an action game.

These options wouldn't be useful if the combat engine were boring, but it's obvious Terminal Reality has spent much of the development process creating a fast-paced, fluid combat experience, and it has succeeded admirably. And while the combat is great on its own, the level designers use and abuse the system by wearing down players with wave after wave of look-alike enemies in each level. They do a great job of making you really hate the whip, too. Virtually every area requires you to toss enemies into some type of object before moving on, whether it's a fan, a speaker, or a wood chipper.

Sometimes that wood chipper will just disappear and prevent you from completing the level, too—*BloodRayne 2* feels unacceptably buggy. In just one three-hour session, there were no less than half a dozen game-breaking glitches. Rayne becomes stuck between objects and spontaneously combusts, boss animations shatter and fall into a never-ending loop, players fall through the ground when the next area is supposed to load, and objective-crucial items visibly and sometimes literally disappear. *BloodRayne 2* needed much more time in QA.

BloodRayne 2's hype would lead you to believe it's a revolutionary sequel. Instead, it's merely an average action game featuring an overly sexy protagonist and an entertaining combat engine held back by myriad game-breaking glitches.

_Patrick Klepek

PUB MAJESCO
DEV TERMINAL REALITY
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $49.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR TYPE NEGATIVE 4/10

BETTER THAN: THE ORIGINAL
NOT AS SEXY AS: LARA CROFT
WAIT FOR IT: BLOODRAYNE: THE MOVIE



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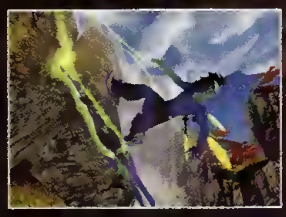


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EVERYONE
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FINAL FANTASY XI: CHAINS OF PROMATHIA

WELCOME, MY FRIENDS, TO THE SHOW THAT NEVEA ENDS...

TEEN | PC [REVIEWED] | PS2

Given all the major updates already patched to *FFXI*, it's difficult to tell exactly what the *Chains of Promathia* expansion brings to the table. Sure, continuing the story line and adding areas gives players new places to visit, new materials to synth, and new enemies to fight. New orchestrations stand up with some of the best *Final Fantasy* music thus far, but besides the geographical additions (players without the expansion simply get bounced back to the preexisting zones if they wander too far), *Chains of Promathia* is a largely uninteresting addition to the series. One of the beautiful new locales, Purgonorgo Isle, is an idyllic Hawaiian-esque setting that seems to serve no purpose other than to be a nice place for some light fishing, material farming, and a new "sport" called clamming. Sure, there's a quest-related reason to go there, but besides some local wildlife, the island is empty.

Other places, like Oldton Molvalpolos, offer good material farming (items dropped by the resident moblins fetch a decent price at auction) and contain a number of quest objectives and nightmare monsters to fight, as well as good places to level up, but not all areas are this balanced. Carpenter's Landing, to name another, is similar to Purgonorgo in that it has little purpose besides widening geographical boundaries. As Square continues to add content through patches and updates, the methods behind *Promathia*'s madness will be made clearer, but for now, these additions are trivial at best.

Equally as trivial are the "emptiness" zones (e.g., Promyvion-Holla/Dem/Mea), which cap you at level 30 and force you to slog your way through mazelike areas with ISP-crushing alliances only to fight a brutal boss at the end (Holla being the worst). All this for the sheer privilege of gaining access to even more cloistered spots like the Tavnazian Safehold—a place, once reached, that won't seem worth the effort. Again, most of this will likely be addressed via a patch, but *Promathia* takes a troubling step in the direction of PC games that ship incomplete. Of course, certain goals, like the new Tuning Fork quest in Windurst, give hope for the future, but *Promathia*'s biggest crime is its lack of any additional job classes (or even hairstyles or character models) to play as. *Rise of the Zilart* added dragoons, ninjas, and more, so why doesn't *Promathia*? While Square will no doubt drag out the release of such additions to milk your monthly fee, common courtesy would have been to plug them in the box. With all MMORPGs, things get better with age (unless said MMORPG has been flooded with gil farmers and bots, like *FFXI* has), but given that most players who started *FFXI* nearly a year ago are ripening like grapes on the vine, *Promathia* should offer worthier excursions than this.

_James Mielke

PUB	SQUARE ENIX	PRICE	$29.99
DEV	SQUARE ENIX	PLAYERS	MULTIPLAYER
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	JAPAN

GMR UNCHAINED **7/10**

JUST CAN'T GET ENOUGH
NOT AS GOOD AS FFXI'S MAJOR PATCHES
WAIT FOR IT: THE NEXT MAJOR PATCH





→ Many of *Promathia*'s new levels are good for pumping up jobs between LV20-75. But most offer precious few things to do. *Yawn.*

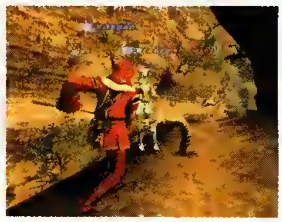


2ND OPINION

Maybe I'm missing the point of MMOs, but I find feelings of accomplishment to be far more rewarding than money or items. For this player, the story and challenges in *Promathia* are not only genuinely interesting but also a welcome respite from the grind.

_Darryl Vassar
Contributor, *GMR*



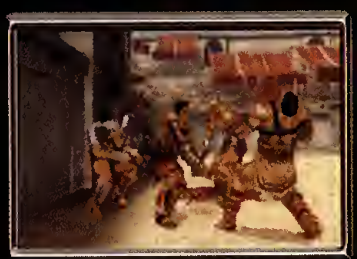






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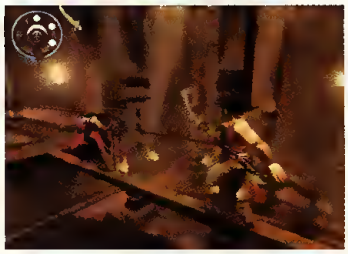
MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence

CAPCOM PlayStation.2

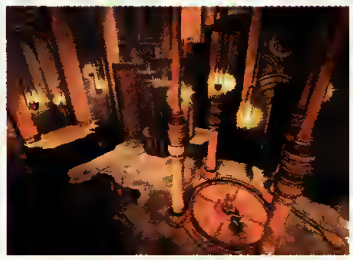
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→ *Warrior Within* is bloody, and we mean *Kill Bill Vol. 1* bloody. All that red stuff garnered the game an M rating. While the blood doesn't bring much to the gameplay, it does fit the darker, more sinister story and the heavy-metal soundtrack.

PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN

THE GYMNAST WITHIN

MATURE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | PC | XB

PUBLISHER	UBISOFT
DEVELOPER	UBISOFT
PRICE	$49.99
RELEASE	AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS	1
ORIGIN	CANADA

About midway through *Prince of Persia: Warrior Within*, a terrible demon called the Dahaka seeks to consume his majesty's royal arse, and it's time for the Prince to run. Within about 40 seconds, our hero must execute a wall-run to a ladder, jump to a pole, jump to another pole and then to a cliff, execute a wall-run to another wall-run to yet another wall-run, go down another ladder, wall-run again, go down a hallway, perform one more wall-run, and then make it to a hiding place. Too slow, and the Prince faces an ugly and horrific death.

This is how imaginative and intense *Warrior Within* can get. Great game design gets the heart racing and the fingers sweating, and this is what *WW* accomplishes pretty much throughout.

The game's opening is somewhat misleading. Its emphasis on combat—far improved over last year's game—makes it seem like this is what to expect in the rest of the game. But the real meat is in the imaginative puzzles that require the Prince to use his superhuman acrobatic skills. For this to work, a solid control set is vital, and *WW* has it. The use of time travel is nicely woven into the gameplay, slowing traps down or rewinding deadly falls as needed. It's a game mechanic that has to be seen to be appreciated. Level designs can be a bit confusing at times, leading to unnecessary backtracking. Once in a while, the camera can be obstructive, making the next move a guess. Switching to first person helps, but not always. The acrobatics can be tricky to execute, so even on Easy, the game can get tough.

That said, the acrobatics alone make *Warrior Within* a must-buy. Rounded out with superb character design and vast *Myst*-like landscapes, this *Prince* is another winner.

_Tom Byron

GMR REGAL **9/10**

BETTER THAN PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME
ON PAR WITH NINJA GAIDEN
WAIT FOR IT: DEATH BY DEGREES

2ND OPINION

There's no denying *POP2*'s splendor as you leap from wall to pole to curtain with inhuman yet believable grace. And while *Sands of Time*'s perfect balance of combat, puzzles and life-replenishing water isn't quite matched here, the adventure is once again divine.

_Greg Ford
Contributing reviewer, *EGM*

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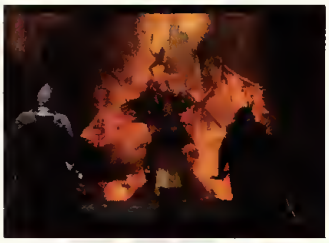
SOUNDTRACK AVAILABLE ON INTERSCOPE RECORDS

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language
Strong Sexual Content
Use of Drugs

PlayStation.2

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→ *Third Age* deftly combines standard RPG game mechanics with the world of the *LOTR* films. Battles can be intense. In the more difficult ones, concentrate on one line of enemies at a time, and make sure Speed attributes are high for the entire party, so they have plenty of turns

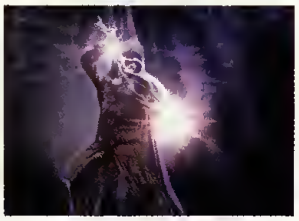












LORD OF THE RINGS: THE THIRD AGE

MIDDLE-EARTH FANTASY

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | XB

PUBLISHER: EA GAMES
DEVELOPER: EA LA
PRICE: $49.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1-2
ORIGIN: U.S.A.

With *The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age*, EA continues its mastery over what marketing wonks refer to as "brand management" by bringing the *LOTR* world to a gaming genre it belongs in—the RPG—and piling on Middle-earth immersion. By no means perfect—and the *Final Fantasy* elite are sure to roll their eyes—*The Third Age* is a convincing and compelling effort.

The game's plot cleverly parallels and intersects with the events of the *LOTR* films. While taking some outrageous liberties (fighting side-by-side with Gandalf against the Balrog), the plot intersections offer powerful reminders of where players are.

As an RPG, *The Third Age* has nice depth but takes no risks. But so what? The design team was wise not to try to reinvent the RPG wheel. The result is pretty straightforward turn-based fare with appropriately dramatic weapons and spells. Gameplay can be challenging and battles are frequent. Players encounter the usual suspects: orcs, wargs, trolls, and goblins (with a chance to play as the enemy as well). Everything moves along at an even, logical pace and save points are generous.

All is well until Helm's Deep, about midway into the game. Here, *The Third Age* takes a sudden ugly turn when the difficulty skyrockets. Certainly Helm's Deep shouldn't be easy, but the game's pattern up to this point isn't adequate preparation for this onslaught. From then on, there seems to be a rise in the frequency and difficulty of enemy encounters, a pattern that can get frustrating quickly.

Frustrating, but not impossible. *The Third Age* brings genuine *LOTR* authenticity and a believable RPG together—a fellowship that works.

_Tom Byron

GMR TOLKIENESQUE **8**/10

BETTER THAN GLADIUS
NOT AS GOOD AS FINAL FANTASY X
WAIT FOR IT FINAL FANTASY XII

2ND OPINION

EA's Final Fantasy-meets-The Lord of the Rings quest seems solid at first, with its lovely visuals, strategic battles, and plentiful movie clips, but it quickly becomes an exercise in boredom. Dull characters, a negligible story line, and wildly repetitive combat make this a sadly hollow RPG

_Shane Bettenhausen
Previews editor, *EGM*

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MATURE 17+

M

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Violence
Strong Language

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PUB ATARI
DEV DIMPS
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $49.99
PLAYERS 1-2
ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR ANIMAYHEM 7/10

BETTER THAN: DBZ: BUDOKAI 2
NOT AS GOOD AS: DEF JAM FIGHT FOR NY
WAIT FOR IT: TEKKEN 5

DRAGON BALL Z: BUDOKAI 3

RRISE THOSE POWER LEVELS!

TEEN | PS2

If you're not already a fan of *Dragon Ball Z* or the *Budokai* games, then *Budokai 3* won't do much to change your mind. Featuring the same simplistic fighting action as *Budokai 2*, the game adds a new type of story mode, some flashy new moves, and not much else. But on the other hand, it's the closest any *DBZ* game has ever come to replicating the insane airborne fights from the show.

If you've never played a *Budokai* game before, don't expect much depth. Attacking is as simple as mashing the Punch, Kick, or Fireball buttons, and pulling off supermoves is only slightly more complicated. Each character controls more or less identically, making for a short learning curve but effectively alienating *Virtua Fighter* fans.

But what *Budokai 3* lacks in substance, it makes up for in style. The effortless controls let players focus on timing, which is key to fancy new moves like teleporting behind your opponent or countering a massive ki blast with one of your own. More impressive are the new "final" moves, which launch lengthy, multistage cut-scenes in which your opponent is spectacularly pummeled in midair before being hurled violently back to earth. But perhaps the biggest improvement is the new story mode, called Dragon Universe. Here, players fly around a 3D world, seeking out battles, unlocking new characters, and leveling up their fighters. Between fights, the story rapidly recaps the *DBZ* timeline. It's over quickly, but since each character follows a different narrative and unlocks different stuff, it's very replayable.

If you're a *DBZ* fan, you're probably already planning to buy this, and you won't be disappointed. For the rest of us, *Budokai 3* is fast-paced, shallow fun.

_Mikel Reparaz

GODZILLA: SAVE THE EARTH

CLASH OF THE TITANS

TEEN | XB [REVIEWED] | PS2

***Godzilla: Save the Earth* tweaks the gameplay from *Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee* and adds more creatures, improved models and texture mapping, smoother animations, tighter control, remixed sounds, and more realistic environments. Players choose one of 18 creatures from the Godzilla mythology and duke it out on top of elaborate cityscapes, using weapons like claws, fangs, laser eyes, and flaming breath. Each creature has strengths and weaknesses, and though jamming on the buttons will take players far, skilled opponents will be able to gore a hole in a haphazard offense.**

Save the Earth shines in its overall presentation, and, ironically, its portrayal of damage to the environment. Weakened skyscrapers crumble, bridges buckle then give, and power lines crackle and injure careless players. There's a tremendous sense of power when unleashing a charged special attack, and colliding beam attacks are transformed into a rock/scissors/paper minigame with the loser suffering explosive results. And though the original audio effects have been enhanced, they remain deliciously campy; many sound as though they were ripped straight out of a 1970s Saturday-morning cartoon.

You can unlock monsters, arenas, and artwork by playing the game's "story," and there are melee, free-for-all, and pure destruction modes. Both the PS2 and Xbox versions support four-player bashing, and those who tire of crushing their puny human friends can seek out competition online.

While it's a fun enough brawler, it's not exactly *Virtua Fighter 4*. But if you enjoy titles in which the local transit system serves as a projectile and a 747 becomes a bladed weapon, you really can't go wrong.

_Doug Trueman

PUB ATARI
DEV PIPEWORKS SOFTWARE
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $39.99
PLAYERS 1-4 (ONLINE)
ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR MONSTER BASH 7/10

BETTER THAN: GODZILLA: DESTROY ALL MONSTERS MELEE
NOT AS GOOD AS: WAR OF THE MONSTERS
WAIT FOR IT: SPIKEOUT



→ Faced with a choice, our unsurprising recommendation goes to the Xbox version. The superior graphics and four built-in controller ports make this a no-brainer for gamers who own both a PS2 and Xbox. That, and you're probably better off finding a good online game over Xbox Live.






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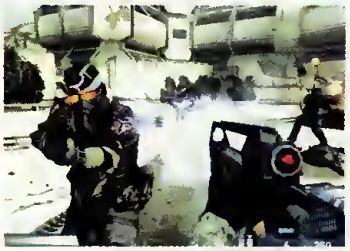




→ Setting aside the imprecise "dead zone" on the DualShock's analog sticks, sniping in *Killzone* is a major pain. Not only that, but you can't move while looking through the scope, which means you'll have to give up cover to snipe.







KILLZONE

KILLS NOT MUCH, AFTER ALL

MATURE | PS2

PUBLISHER: SCEA
DEVELOPER: GUERRILLA GAMES
PRICE: $39.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1-16 (ONLINE)
ORIGIN: U.K.

Much ado has been made about the PlayStation 2's apparent need for a high-profile FPS to counter what is available on a certain competitor's system. But what nobody stopped to consider is if said FPS needs something more than the PS2.

Proving that you don't always need outer space for good science fiction, Guerrilla's vision of future combat takes themes, imagery, and battle scenarios from World War II and transports them to the not-too-distant future. The result is a refreshing mix of past and prophecy: *Killzone*'s art direction is superb throughout the game's varied levels, and the inspiration drawn from *Halo* (namely the limited weapons and emphasis on strategic battle) leads to some thrilling encounters with the game's instantly iconic enemy.

Slowly emerging from a thick mist, clad entirely in black but for the eerie orange glow emanating from their eyes, the helghast were specifically designed to invoke fear. But the helghast are as inept as they are visually intimidating, and to compensate for this, they are able to absorb a lot of firepower and volley back shots with unreasonable accuracy. Using the DualShock's deficient analog sticks in a heated gun battle, when things turn choppy, is an exercise in imprecision, and combat that could have been excellent is hamstrung.

And that can be said for the game as a whole: The hardware simply isn't powerful enough to consistently process what *Killzone* wants to do, in both single-player and online multiplayer modes. Similar to how Rare's *Perfect Dark* stressed the N64 near the end of that system's life, a game with otherwise excellent attributes finds itself arriving much too late for one party and a little too early for the next.

_Andrew Pfister

GMR RUSHED 7/10

ON PAR WITH: FAR CRY
NOT AS GOOD AS: HALO 2
WAIT FOR IT: PROJECT SNOWBLIND

2ND OPINION

Sure, next to Xbox shooters (especially *Halo*, from which it borrows so heavily) *Killzone*'s framerate troubles and other problems loom large. But for the PS2, you'd be hard-pressed to find a better FPS, especially online. Fairly simple and often mindless, but still fun.

_Mark MacDonald
Executive editor, *EGM*



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NCAA MARCH MADNESS 2005

IT'S A SHOWSTOPPER, BABY!

EVERYONE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | XB

You know that really sappy song that's played during the outro of the NCAA tournament over the montage of jaw-dropping upsets, exciting moments, and unchecked enthusiasm? It goes, "One shining moment, you reach for the sky. One shining moment...." These lyrics open *March Madness 2005*. How cool is that?

So, while the authenticity pulls at fans' heartstrings from the opening seconds, there are plenty of nonsentimental elements in EA's latest college hoops effort as well. The best new bit is the classic games. You jump in with the chance to change or reaffirm history. Remember Keith Smart's last-second jumper in '87? You can relive it. Or how about Christian Laettner's turnaround that put a knife in Kentucky's heart? That's in there, too. You can even go end to end like UCLA's Tyus Edney did in '95 to beat Mizzou's Tigers. The horror!

As for the gameplay, it's fun, fast, and accentuated with color commentary tidbits by the one and only Dickie V. Still, there are some flaws, such as the prevalence of midair fouls. If you challenge a guy floating toward the hoop at all, a foul gets called. You can use sliders to tone it down, but that's not the player's job, it's EA's. Another problem is the busted fast break—since players always turn around to receive the ball, the defense is able to catch up. And it's a bit irritating that almost every shot that goes in is a swish. The drama of finding the rim and rolling the ball in once in a while has been done better.

Still, you can do some really cool off-the-ball maneuvering, such as selecting a player without the ball, running him around, and then calling for the pass when you're open. You can also call plays of varying complexity and work for open shots that way. The defense is tough, but if you sink an open look, it feels so good.

With great presentation (the crowd brings some serious noise, and the camera even shakes if the crowd gets amped up) and a fantastic dynasty mode, this is the premier college hoops game this season.

_Todd Zuniga



PUB	EA SPORTS	PRICE	$39.99
DEV	EA CANADA	PLAYERS	1-8 (ONLINE)
REL	NOVEMBER	ORIGIN	CANADA

GMR 8/10 SHOWTIME, BABY!

BETTER THAN NCAA COLLEGE BASKETBALL 2K5
NOT AS GOOD AS ILLINOIS
ON PAR WITH DUKE

ESPN COLLEGE HOOPS 2K5

ZONED DEFENSE

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | XB

There are some really good things to say about *ESPN College Hoops 2K5*, namely the way the game plays, the way you can get nice open shots if you work for it, the way the fast break works...and then came the A.I. buzz kill. Up four points with 25 seconds to play, the team with the advantage inbounds the ball and walks up the court. The clock ticks away without any defensive pressure...game over. Victory without a fight.

Veteran hoops fans know the D should've fouled, which would have put the baller on the free-throw line and extended the game so the CPU could then try to tie it. But instead they stood there, admiring the left-handed dribble from afar.

That's the big one. Its little bothers include announcers who are completely void of flow and chemistry, a pale arena atmosphere, an offense that gets bunched together too often, and shooters who lazily spin before a shot when you're hoping for a quick stop-and-pop—which means the defense has every chance to get in position for a block.

But the good is really good, and if you're playing only against human opponents, you won't run into the silly A.I. mistakes. The rim physics are tons better than those in *March Madness*. The ball will bounce and spin—resulting in misses or makes—which adds drama. The fast breaks make for much more wide-open gameplay, and you're more likely to pull up for a two-point jumper than you are in *March Madness* because you'll actually see separation between you and the defender. The new free-throw system will confuse old-timers with its simplicity. Instead of concentrating on a meter, you actually watch the player shooting and release the ball when the shooter should—a shockingly easy and smart concept. Tie-ups make the possession arrow count, the give-and-go is cool and easy to execute, and the blocks are realistically rare, but when they happen, they're epic.

It's that A.I. thing that's a killer. The price is definitely right, but basing it on gameplay alone, this one lags behind this season's No. 1: *March Madness*.

_Todd Zuniga

PUB	SEGA	PRICE	$19.99
DEV	VISUAL CONCEPTS	PLAYERS	1-8 (ONLINE)
REL	NOVEMBER	ORIGIN	U.S.A.

GMR 7/10 BUZZER BEATEN

BETTER THAN DEPAUL
NOT AS GOOD AS NCAA MARCH MADNESS 2005
ON PAR WITH GONZAGA

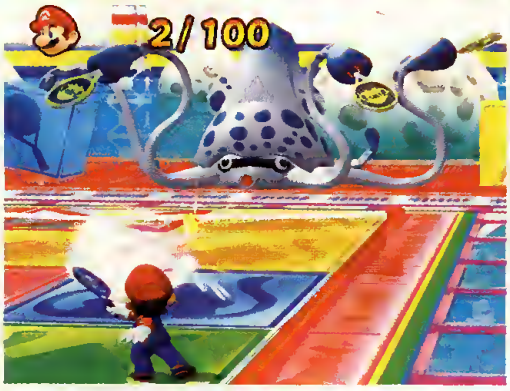




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→ *Mario Power Tennis*, just like every other character-driven Nintendo game in recent memory, is littered with in-jokes and references to the *Mario* universe. Above we see Mario rallying against against a giant blooper from *Super Mario Sunshine* in one of the many amusing tutorials/minigames. To the right, Mario whips out his iconic hammer on the classic *Mario Bros.* court, complete with 2D turtle and crab sprites. As much as it likes to torture them, Nintendo really does like its fans.

MARIO POWER TENNIS

A NEW SPIN ON AN OLD RACKET

EVERYONE | GC

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: CAMELOT
PRICE: $49.99
RELEASE: NOVEMBER
PLAYERS: 1-4
ORIGIN: JAPAN

Tennis, even with its nuances, is really about hitting a ball back and forth. It's fun, but let's face it, it can get monotonous, especially as a videogame. *Mario Power Tennis* injects the sport with all kinds of Nintendo wackiness and takes tennis about as far from *Pong* as one could imagine.

From powerhouses like Donkey Kong to tricksters like Shy Guy, every Mushroom Kingdom denizen has a repertoire of crazy offensive and defensive shots at their disposal. Peach's power shot breaks into a hundred tiny hearts, distracting you from the real tennis ball. Luigi can use a vacuum move to suck up a faraway ball, bringing it close enough to hit. Wario can hammer a megafast ball at you. Truth be told, though, while power shots are part of what differentiates this game from its predecessors, they do interrupt gameplay, forcing you to wait for an animation to end before you can return the shot. Plus, since characters can use a power shot to reach a far-off ball, there are fewer opportunities to miss shots—making for some very long tournaments.

These are minor criticisms, though: The craziness definitely adds fun—and it doesn't end with the shots: Gimmick courts throw new obstacles at you, like slippery banana peels, conveyor belts, and pesky alligators. Unlockable modes, shots, and courts are well paced. Minigames—including one in which you hit paint balls at a picture to color it in before time runs out and another in which you rally with the Gooper Blooper but can't hit certain parts of the court—while not robust, are challenging enough to keep you playing.

Mario Power Tennis may not reinvent the game, but it definitely whacks it up enough to warrant a revisit.

_Carrie Shepherd

GMR BJORN AGAIN **8/10**

BETTER THAN SMASH COURT PRO TOURNAMENT 2
NOT AS GOOD AS MARIO GOLF ADVANCE
WAIT FOR IT MARIO PARTY 6

2ND OPINION

Tennis games. In my opinion are some of the best party games available (just as long as they're done right) *Virtua Tennis* and *Mario Tennis* were favorites of last generation, and *Mario Power Tennis* looks like it'll be this gen's fave. Even if they did go overboard with the animations

_Andrew Pfister



WE WILL SPARE NO ONE

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Violence
Strong Language

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PUB SCEA
DEV HARMONIX
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $49.99 WITH EYETOY
PLAYERS 1-4
ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR FUTURISTIC 7/10

BETTER THAN: EYETOY: PLAY
ON PAR WITH: EYETOY: GROOVE
WAIT FOR IT: EYETOY: CHAT

EYETOY: ANTIGRAV
NEWTONIAN PLEASURE

EVERYONE | PS2

When it's working, *AntiGrav* is a sublime experience that incorporates the feel of flying, acrobatics, and racing all in one. Unfortunately, the finicky EyeToy provides less than optimal control, resulting in intermittent bursts of frustration.

The concept is great: The EyeToy tracks your head and hand movements, and your character performs corresponding actions—in a futuristic hoverboard-racing competition—onscreen. You wave your arms to perform tricks like flips, rolls, and grabs—and of course, sick combos. You actually have to jump and duck to clear obstacles and move your head to steer your board. The result is a much more "in the game" feel than a typical board racer, and all the movement makes you work up a sweat. Environments—packed with ramps, rails, flying portals, drops, and targets—have multiple paths and unlockable sections, with lots of opportunities for exploration and experimentation. Without a straight path, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that you're in a race, but a helpful onscreen gauge shows your progress.

The main problem is that it's impossible to play without just the right lighting conditions. Even in natural light, the EyeToy sometimes loses track of your head or a hand, so races you otherwise should have won are lost unfairly. The game is brief, albeit well paced, with just five environments. Multiplayer games aren't much different than single-player ones; players race one at a time against competitors' ghost images. It's just not as satisfying as competing simultaneously—obviously not an option with one EyeToy.

AntiGrav is revolutionary and provides an unparalleled interactive board-racing experience. The camera technology makes it impractical for sustained play in dim living rooms, though, so proceed with caution. ■

_Carrie Shepherd

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR
A CONSOLE STRATEGY GAME FOR A PC CROWD

MATURE | PC

When *Full Spectrum Warrior* first came out for Xbox, everyone made a big deal out of it. "This was originally used to train troops!" "It's so accurate, it's amazing!" Aw, get over it. Is the game any fun? Yeah, it's a tarted-up strategy game with actiony inclinations...and for the Xbox, it was pretty damn innovative. That sort of stuff plays well for the console crowd, but here in PC land, we're a bunch of jaded bastards. After all, RTS games are our bread and butter.

First, let's say that you do get a little more bang for your buck here. The graphics are amped up for the PC, and you do get a couple extra missions. Heck, they even did a pretty good job of mapping over the Xbox version's gamepad-reliant control scheme.

This game is all about running for cover and pinning down opposing forces. Problem is, since there is almost no enemy A.I. to speak of, the tactics are pretty straightforward. Once you figure out the patterns, this quickly devolves into a *Guns & Ammo* puzzle game with target dummies that shoot back. You know where the next set of enemies will be and how to cut off their escape. This is a decent war effort, but any self-respecting strategy gamer needs to crank up the difficulty to get anything substantial out of it.

THQ was fighting an uphill battle here from the get-go. PC players have a set of expectations that couldn't be met without more solid A.I. That, plus unfulfilling multiplayer, takes away any chances for a Medal of Honor here. ■

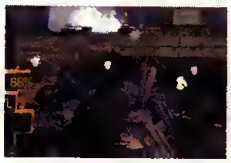
_Darren Gladstone

PUB THQ
DEV PANDEMIC STUDIOS
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $39.99
PLAYERS 1-2 (ONLINE)
ORIGIN U.S.A.

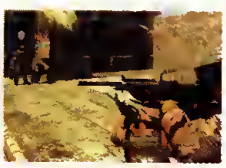
GMR POINT BLANK 7/10

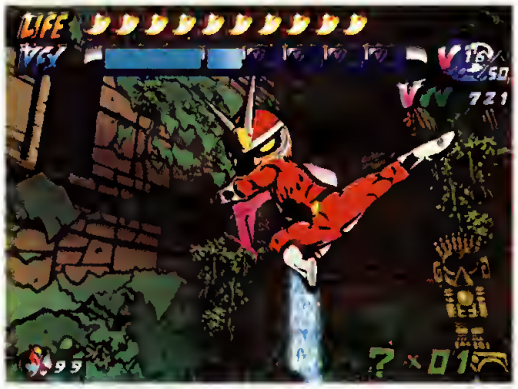
SOMEONE GOT THEIR RTS IN MY ACTION GAME
SOMEONE GOT THEIR ACTION GAME IN MY RTS
TWO GREAT TASTES. THAT DON'T QUITE WORK
TOGETHER

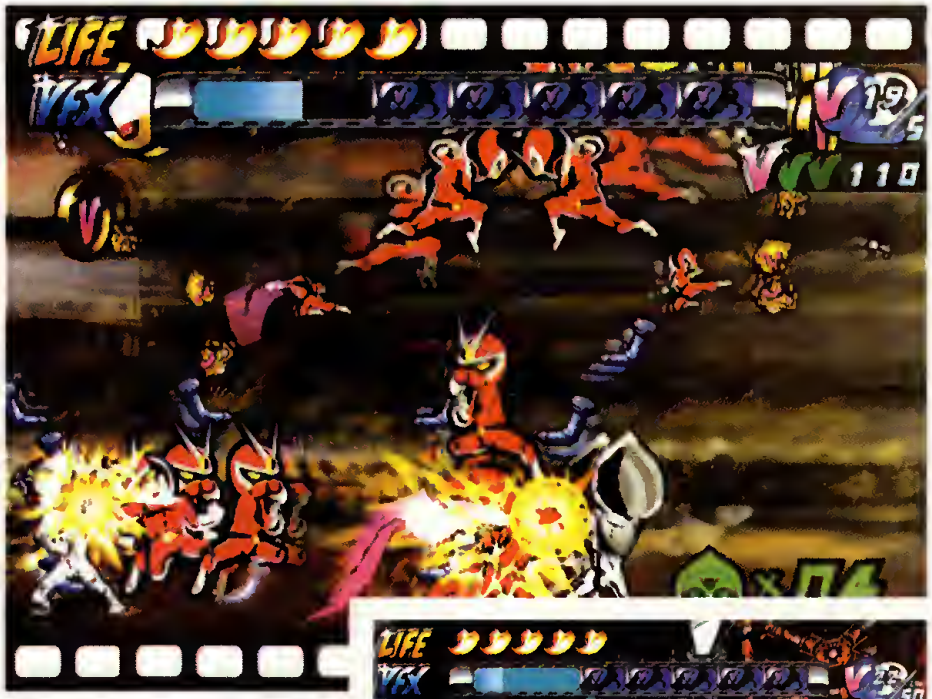




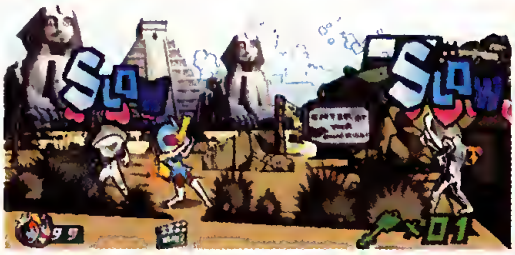


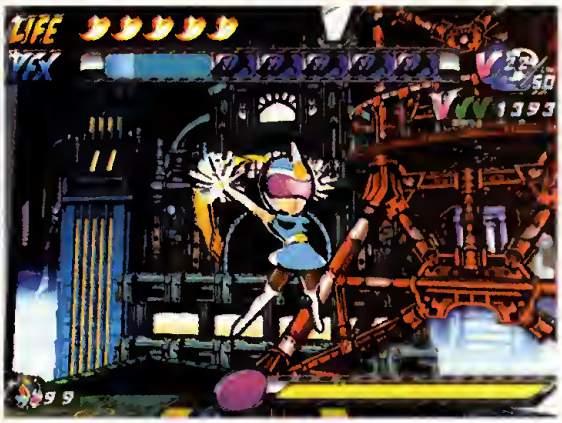


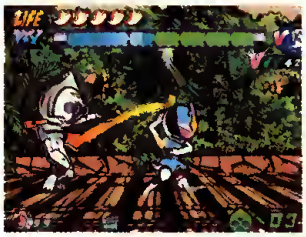


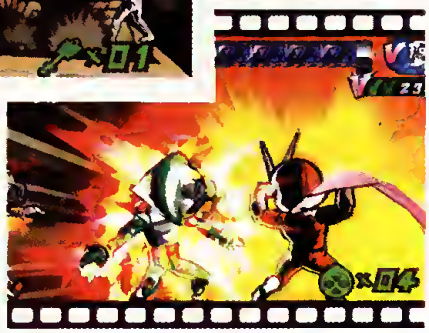












→ She's more than just a pair of legs. Silvia's twin-pistol grip gives her the long-range flavor that Joe lacks. Plus, she talks a lot of smack, so she's complementary to Joe's casual, laid-back demeanor. Sigh. Women.

VIEWTIFUL JOE 2

FEELS LIKE THE FIRST TIME

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC

PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
PRICE: $39.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: JAPAN

The worst thing that can be said about *Viewtiful Joe 2* is that it's a lot like the first game, and that's a good thing. *Viewtiful Joe* is like a modern-day *Comix Zone*, no small feat on the part of Clover Studio. It's no wonder that gamers gawked in awe at the diminutive red devil's adventures barely a year ago.

Well, a year has passed, and Joe, Silvia, and Captain Blue are back at it in yet another pseudo-2D sojourn into frantic, filmic escapades. The action is largely the same as before, but Silvia now has Blinx-like replay powers. Playing as her (players can swap between Silvia and Joe at any time with the press of a button) is a nice counterpoint to utilizing Joe's *Streets of Rage* fervor. Whether you stick with her twin-pistol discharge or go with a more melee-based approach, using Silvia is a necessity in order to beat some of the game's trickier puzzles. That's not to suggest Joe gets left by the wayside, though, as his participation is just as necessary in order to advance. The controls, as before, are tight and responsive, the graphics border on eye melting, and the work of the voice crew is just as inspired as ever.

This, combined with the various shooter-style vehicular excursions, is all well and good, but following up such a distinctive game with...an equally distinctive game is about as shocking as moving from one *Tetris* to another, especially in such a short time. Since Silvia was unlockable in the original game, *VJ2*, in reality, feels more like *Viewtiful Joe 1.5*, despite a few interesting plot twists and some of the craziest, most inspired boss battles around.

The world needs more heroes, and Joe's heroness is about as joyous as they come.

_James Mielke

GMR RED HOT **8**/10

COOLER THAN YOU
NOT AS COOL AS DANTE IN VIEWTIFUL JOE FOR PS2
WAIT FOR IT PROJECT ALTERED BEAST

2NO OPINION

More of a good thing is always a good thing. Sure, *Joe 2* doesn't bring much new, but it feels more like a solid extension of the first game rather than a simple expansion. The replay power is quite clever, as is the character swapping midgame. This sequel confirms that *Joe* is among the best of this gen's new franchises.

_Andrew Pfister





→ Bikes, introduced in *Vice City*, make a triumphant return in *San Andreas*. In addition to multiple motorcycle styles, there are also dirt bikes (handy for cross-country travel), as well as good ol' fashioned bicycles











GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

NOT JUST A STATE, BUT A STATE OF MIND

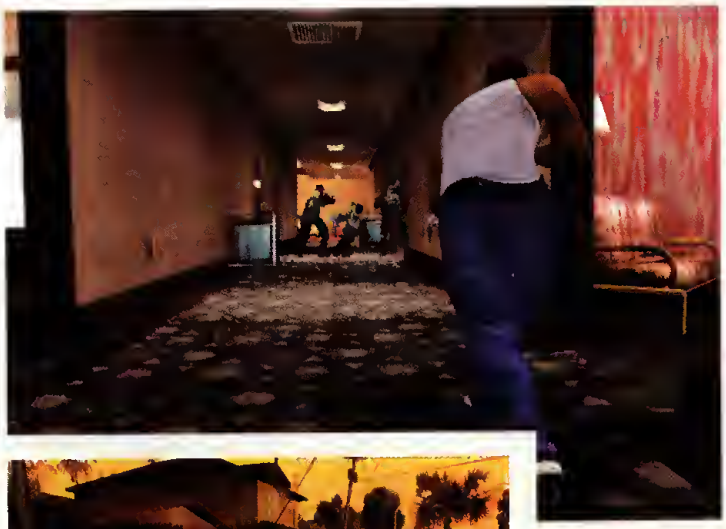
MATURE | PS2

PUBLISHER	ROCKSTAR
DEVELOPER	ROCKSTAR
PRICE	$49.99
RELEASE	AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS	1-2 (LIMITED CO-OP)
ORIGIN	U.K.

With *Grand Theft Auto*, Rockstar gives gamers what they want. And no, it's not drugs, hookers, gratuitous cursing, or easily run over pedestrians. What gamers want, what they've wanted for years really, is freedom. The opportunity to do whatever they want, and when presented with objectives, the ability to accomplish them however they want. It's no surprise that so many developers—some for better, some for worse—are imitating *GTA*'s open-ended nature: It fulfills the desire to explore, to be creative, to make your own fun. "Sandbox" gameplay, as it's frequently called.

But now the ante has been raised considerably. One city is no longer enough. Two cities aren't enough. It now takes three large metropolitan centers separated by miles of distinct and interesting rural areas just to equal what Rockstar has accomplished with *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. But that's merely the first step: Such a massive gamespace needs to be filled with entertaining things to do, lest the landscape go to waste. And to bring it all together, there needs to be a compelling context in which you're playing and making decisions; otherwise, there's no guidance or sense of accomplishment. Though it falters on some technical, mechanical, and, yes, moral issues—some of which are surprisingly basic—*San Andreas* successfully fuses its grand scale with consistently clever missions that are set in an interesting era. And by doing so, it excels in providing a cohesive, "living" virtual world.

The key to creating this is having so many things to do in the cities and the countryside, be they plot-related missions, the plethora of extracurricular activities, or just the act of causing random chaos. Each city has its own distinct feel that matches up almost perfectly with its real-life counterpart, and this, along with the separation provided by the countryside (without any load times) helps to realize San Andreas as an actual state.











→ *"The first thing I met was a fly with a buzz, and the sky with no clouds. The heat was hot and the ground was dry, but the air was full of sound."*

It says a lot that when you are taking care of business up in San Fierro, it's possible to actually feel homesick for what was left behind in Los Santos. Even after 40 hours of play, there may be places on the map that still have not been explored and entire series of side missions that have yet to be completed. San Andreas is that big.

But it's possible that some might find the game too big for its own good. Stretching the hardware so thin in order to cover such a large scope raises problems, some that are left over from the first two games, some that are new, including terrible draw distances, environmental pop-up, an erratic framerate, low NPC variety, and dumb and glitchy artificial intelligence. Some of this affects the gameplay, such as in cases when cars and cops appear out of nowhere or when mission-critical characters get run over and killed by an idiotic A.I. driver. The most bothersome flaw is that the targeting still has not been completely fixed. Cycling through multiple targets is easy enough, but sometimes acquiring an initial lock is difficult, and the camera doesn't always cooperate with what you're trying to look at. There is also a distinct lack of overall polish, mostly noticeable in the small details: ugly character models, cluttered maps (the custom waypoint is a welcome and downright necessary addition), unnecessarily complex wardrobe management, odd misspellings ("Cobra Marital Arts"), and even repeated references to Los Angeles instead of Los Santos.

It's easy and understandable to brush the problems aside, considering that there's just so much to do: gambling, truck deliveries, racing, car modification, the import/export business, dating, vehicular missions, and more. Growing CJ as a character is also an excellent addition, and making things like muscle mass and weight more than just cosmetic changes shows that Rockstar gets it: If it's going to be in the game, make sure it's relevant. The main missions thread out, making sure that equal time is spent among the cities and country, but never too thin as to detract from the main

[BIG BALLAS]
A TALE OF THREE CITIES

Strengthening the cohesion, each of the main characters you meet in Los Santos, San Fierro, and Las Venturas is somehow involved in the greater picture, and surprisingly, every last one of them is likeable on some level. This is accomplished with sharp dialogue, tremendous voice acting (especially CJ), and well-directed cut-scenes. The big-name voice talent (Samuel L. Jackson, Peter Fonda, James Woods, Axl Rose) and yet another brilliant soundtrack and radio system was money well spent. Other developers who don't understand how to make their games *feel* important need to take a close look at *San Andr*eas.

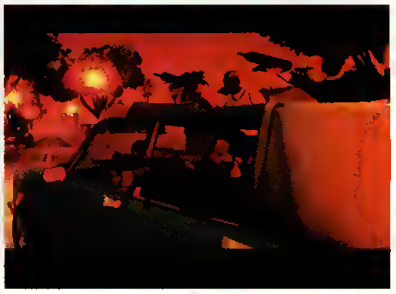












narrative: CJ's return to San Andreas. It also takes its subject matter seriously, and though it liberally peppers the story with drug use, sexual innuendo, and remorseless violence, *San Andr*eas rarely stoops to relying on demeaning stereotypes or shock value to generate cheap controversy.

And that's a delicate issue because each person is going to see *San Andr*eas' content differently. For its part, CJ's story is one of redemption, loyalty, family ties, and staying true to one's roots. It's just jarring that in order to avoid being framed for the murder of an innocent policeman, CJ must complete certain missions that offer no way around the murder of many innocent policemen. This is not new, as *Vice City* also had similar missions, but it's no less ambiguous this time around. *San Andr*eas also feels much less a caricature of its chosen era than *Vice City*'s *Scarf*ace tribute. Gang violence, especially in the early 1990s, is undoubtedly something that has affected more people in a real, significant way than stereotypical organized crime has, and as odd as this may sound, killing scores of underprivileged black and Latino youths raises mental flags in a way that taking on *GTA3*'s and *Vice City*'s thugs didn't.

But the most interesting part of all this is that Rockstar has ended up painting itself into a corner. Does it start over in the next generation with just one city and a focus on ironing out the remaining wrinkles, or is designing an entire virtual state suddenly no longer enough? Is it time to add *Fable*-esque moral paths? For everything that it's accomplished so far, and even considering the staggering size of *San Andr*eas, there's still room to grow beyond *GTA*'s current borders.

_Andrew Pfister

GMR GOOD LOOKIN' OUT **9/10**

BETTER THAN ALL COMPETITION
NOT AS GOOD AS IT COULD BE
WAIT FOR IT. THE GETAWAY 2

2ND OPINION

One of SA's biggest achievements is its most intimate. Within a few hours of play, you'll have forged quite an emotional bond with CJ and will start to genuinely like him. It forces you to balance your growing friendship with him against your distaste for what he's being forced to do.

_John Davison
Editor-in-chief, *OPM*

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→ Be warned—you can't really get a unique look. Other Urbz wear one of a few outfits for the 'hood—and one of the rewards for becoming more popular is that everyone will copy your style.

THE URBZ: SIMS IN THE CITY

MOVIN' ON UP?

TEEN | XB [REVIEWED] | GC | PS2

PUBLISHER EA GAMES
DEVELOPER MAXIS
PRICE $49.99
RELEASE NOVEMBER
PLAYERS 1-2
ORIGIN U.S.A.

There's more than a location change for the Sims for their third console visit. *The Urbz*—aka *The Sims* visits the big city—doesn't reinvent the gameplay of its predecessors, but it does refine it. Unfortunately, it's not all for the better.

The Urbz looks better than its precursors, and not only are you encouraged to change your character's looks, you're required to if you want to get a rep in the nine neighborhoods. *The Urbz* is all about rep—not only looking the part, but talking the talk as well. You learn social moves, such as flame blowing or the snappity snap, which will win you favor from other characters, and by attending exclusive parties, you gain power socials that defeat villains.

There was an opportunity for skill-based gameplay, but none was implemented. For example, instead of figuring out which social moves would work in an area, the acceptable moves for each character are color-coded, so there's no guesswork. And whereas in other *Sims* games you really felt like you were mastering time management by keeping needs met, *The Urbz* has little such juggling. Motives are fulfilled more quickly, and there's no more cleaning up after yourself. This removes a tedious aspect of the game, but it makes playing it less challenging. Then there's your Urbz's jobs: From fashion modeling to ferret taming, every career involves matching button-presses to those onscreen. Promotions require physical, intellectual, or creative skill points—but getting those skill points requires only that you can button-mash.

Some may view the simplification as a lost opportunity. For others, building up a character as the most popular Sim in a tongue-in-cheek hip urban world is compelling enough. ◀

_Carrie Shepherd

GMR SIM-PLE **7**/10

EASIER THAN TRYING TO GET POPULAR IN REAL LIFE
NOT AS GOOD AS THE SIMS 2
ON PAR WITH THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT

2ND OPINION

Could have been worse, but could have been better, too. For a game that's supposed to be about the noisy, crazy, vibrant world of the city, *The Urbz* is surprisingly repetitive and rote. Don't expect the same intense addictiveness that *The Sims* has. ◀

_Nich Maragos
GMR contributor

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RETROACTIVE

IT WASN'T ALWAYS ABOUT THE MASTER CHIEF. A LOOK BACK AT BUNGIE'S STORIED PAST

EAT THE PATH: BUNGIE'S ROAD TO HALO 2

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

Most people know Bungie as the company that gave the world *Halo*, but it has a legacy of excellent first-person shooters stretching back more than a decade. Check out the adventures that paved the way for one of the most anticipated games of all time and see if you can find inklings of the upcoming gold standard of first-person shooters.

PATHWAYS INTO DARKNESS

CHTHONIC ADVENTURE

MACINTOSH | 1993

If anyone had known the term "survival-horror" in 1993, they would have used it to describe *Pathways Into Darkness*. Though presented as a first-person shooter, it has more in common with *Alone in the Dark* than *Doom*.

Pathways sends players two miles beneath an Aztec pyramid, where they are beset by nightmarish creatures given form by the dreams of a slumbering Lovecraftian god who is on the brink of awakening—at which point it will destroy the world. Clearly, not a morning person. A mysterious crystal enables conversations with explorers who died in the pyramid, including the other members of the player's squadron. Also on hand are the remains of Nazi soldiers who had gone seeking supernatural treasures for der Führer half a century before.

Success hinges on listening to the dead and methodically fighting the undead with the limited weapons and mysterious artifacts scavenged within the pyramid. The mission has a strict time limit of three game days before the god's awakening—fail to nuke the god and escape within that time, and you get the bad ending.

Pathways really shows its age these days, but it's still a unique experience that demonstrates Bungie's knack for integrating challenging action with excellent narrative.

NOW...	Cool story, but it's as slow as a zombie and twice as ugly.	CREAKY 5/10
THEN...	An innovative adventure that hinted at things to come.	CREEPY 8/10



MARATHON
HALO'S LONG-LOST FATHER

MACINTOSH | 1994

Veteran Mac gamers are easy to spot—they're the ones who get all misty-eyed when you say the word "*Marathon*." While PC owners were getting their *Doom* on, on the Mac there was just Bungie's FPS masterpiece.

Those accustomed to Id's fast-paced blastfest scoffed at *Marathon*'s slow, methodical speed and its less edgy tone (read: no pentagrams). But the game isn't really about high-speed fragging or sheer adrenaline. It's about story and exploration.

Marathon's story presentation isn't as elegant as those in later titles, like *Half-Life* or *Halo*, but it is still engrossing. Players log on to terminals found throughout the game to communicate with the colony ship's schizoid computers and thwart the invading armies of pfhor slavers—a structural progression later borrowed by *Metroid Prime*. Observant players can also piece together crucial information about the bigger story, like the fact that the silent main character is secretly one of 10 advanced Mjolnir cyborgs smuggled aboard the ship by Martian revolutionaries.

The game can easily be completed without poring over the terminals, but the twisting plot provides justification for the mayhem and added to *Marathon*'s cult status. The superbly balanced multiplayer mode, intricately designed levels, and cool innovations—such as the helpless BOB (born on board) colonists and the spooky mission through a vacuum-exposed relay station—didn't hurt, either. For the time, an innovative and complex construction compared to Id's run-n-gun approach.

Marathon's feeling a little long in the tooth these days. Fortunately, its legacy lives on through *Halo*, a sort of 3D reincarnation of Bungie's groundbreaking shooter.

NOW... Dated, but definitely playable.	AGED 6/10
THEN... Smart, intense shooting action.	GREAT 8/10



MORE THAN THIS...
THE REST OF THE STORY

There's more to Bungie than just shooters, of course—we just don't have space to cover all of the company's classics. But here's the list.

GNOP: A monochromatic Mac remake of...well, read the name backward.

OPERATION DESERT STORM: A fairly unremarkable game based on America's first conflict with Iraq.

MINOTAUR: LABYRINTH OF CRETE: It's so dated as to be unplayable these days, but *Minotaur* offered a clue to Bungie's future: multiplayer support. While it only worked on an AppleTalk LAN, it was a vital first step toward *Halo*.

ABUSE: A *Contra*–esque side-scroller for Mac and PC that uses the mouse for aiming. Edgy!

MYTH AND MYTH II: Strategy games with a difference: minimal resource gathering and true 3D graphics—a first for the genre. *Myth* also boasts impressive physics that make terrain a vital factor. You've never known true happiness until you've slipped a dwarf suicide bomber into an enemy squad, limbs flying everywhere.

ONI: A promising but ultimately disappointing 3D brawler, notable mainly for being the company's first console title. Unless you count the Pippin port of *Marathon 2*. (We don't.)



MARATHON 2: DURANDAL/INFINITY

BAAIN THE SIZE OF A PLANET (AND GAOWING)

MACINTOSH | 1994 // PC/PIPPIN | 1996 // MACINTOSH | 1996

Marathon 2 begins by dropping players into the middle of a fight between pfhor and human forces and never lets up. A completely overhauled (and much faster) game engine combined with a bigger plot, devious level design, and BOBs who can shoot back make it even more entertaining than the original.

Again, the plot drives the adventure. Ex-*Marathon* A.I. Durandal decides that his best shot at immortality is to use technology created by the s'pht's vanished creators to prevent the universe from closing in a reverse Big Bang. To that end, Durandal heads to the s'pht homeworld Lh'owon, where he is summarily walloped by fellow ex-*Marathon* A.I. Tycho and the pfhor. The player's Mjolnir ultimately turn the tide of the battle, Durandal makes a miraculous return, and everyone goes home happy—except the pfhor, who go home with their tails between their legs.

The series' finale, *Marathon Infinity*, reuses the same engine, adding only a single new weapon (and BOBs with nasty plasma pistols). The initial reaction was disappointment—PC gamers had *Quake*, and here Bungie was retreading fake 3D technology!

It's only in retrospect that *Infinity*'s quality becomes apparent. Bungie and developer Double Aught were able to focus entirely on crafting a convoluted story full of time travel—the Mjolnir leap across realities to prevent the pfhor from accidentally destroying the galaxy. The level design is equally complex, on par with newer shooters.

Infinity is an acquired taste, to be sure, but it just might stand as Bungie's most intricate creation to date.

MAAATHON 2

NOW... Awfully dated, and oh, those tacky pfhor interior designs! — EYESORE 6/10

THEN... Sharp, fast, and compelling—a great shooter. — AI-YI-YI 9/10



→ *Marathon 2: Durandal* introduced the ability to take a dive and duke it out with foes underwater, where fists were more effective than handguns.



MAAATHON INFINITY

NOW... Dense story and level design impress more now that they've soaked in. — WHOA! 7/10

THEN... Often confusing and seemingly largely more of the same. — WHAT? 7/10



→ Mr. Hunter, meet Mr. SPNKR.

DOWNLOAD THIS!

PFHOA THOSE JUST TUNING IN

Missed out on *Marathon*? Don't own a Mac? Check out http://source.bungie.org and download *Aleph One*, an OpenGL port of the *Marathon* series to Linux, Windows, and OS X. You need the original data files, but the Mac Action Sack goes for cheap these days. Happy shooting!



HALO
YOU CAN CALL IT MARATHON 2.0: KILLER APP

XBOX | 2001

Nintendo 64 had *Super Mario 64*. Dreamcast had *Virtua Fighter 3*. And Xbox had *Halo*, the launch-day killer app.

Halo wasn't Xbox's best-looking launch title—that was *DOA3*. But where Tecmo's fighter is a highly focused experience, *Halo* gives players an enormous world in which to battle foes, a stoic badass of a hero in the enigmatic Master Chief, and an epic story to keep everyone hooked.

But even more important, it offers a vast virtual playground via multiplayer matches. For those who had the resources, *Halo* provided an unprecedented experience: a networked console FPS that stood toe-to-toe with any PC shooter on the market.

The game isn't without its flaws. Many people complained that the middle section of the game mostly consists of backtracking through previously explored territory, and Bungie diehards lamented the simplified plot and minimal backstories. There is also a matter of weapon balance; the needler was uselessly weak while the pistol was perhaps a little too effective.

But these minor quibbles weren't enough to prevent *Halo* from becoming one of the best-selling games of its generation. Entire fan communities have built up around exploiting game glitches, and popular fansite Red vs. Blue has used the multiplayer mode as the basis for a series of hilarious videos.

Three years later, *Halo* is still going strong—in fact, it seems the only force on earth that can put an end to its popularity is *Halo 2*. And even with the sequel rocking gamers everywhere, the original won't be forgotten anytime soon.

NOW...	Superb solo, magnificent in multiplayer—a true classic.	STILL BRILLIANT 9/10
THEN...	Five million Xbox users can't be wrong.	BRILLIANT 9/10







→ *Halo* was originally pitched as a Mac and PC title, so the Apple faithful were hurt when Bungie jumped ship to Microsoft (the Mac-head's enemy) and turned the game into the showcase title for the Xbox, while the Mac and PC ports were a bit, well, janky.



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MORE

TIPS. CODES. ONLINE. AND MORE

THIS MONTH IN MORE

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We got through the rough bits, so they won't be so rough for you

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Codes? Check. Unlockables? Check. Sassy robot? Check.

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Happy anniversary, Roundabouts!

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Hockey, soccer, Josh Childress, and more

GAME GEEZER 146
Geezer's sick of hype



Don't dress like this big red man. Read on and find out why!

HALO 2

IT'S NOT THE SIZE OF YOUR 'HOG, IT'S HOW YOU USE IT

A GRUNT'S GUIDE TO SURVIVING HALO 2

Getting your butt through *Halo 2* alive is no mean feat. The Covenant throws everything and the kitchen sink at you, including scarabs, grunts, Elites, brutes, airborne bad boys, vehicles, and more. *GMR* puts the stove on high and cooks up a few things you should consider before charging into the heat of battle. Grab a fork and be warned: Potential spoilers await you.



WOULD YOU HOLD MY SCORPION?

As in the first game, there will be many times when the stainless-steel behemoth, the Scorpion, becomes available for use. It's in your best interest to use this vehicle *for as long as possible*. When you board the Scorp, make sure to chill for a few seconds while any available soldiers in the vicinity hop on. Not only do your men survive a lot longer than they do in the first game, they're useful for firing rockets (unlimited ammo, believe it) at Covenant vehicles and sniping enemies from far away. Hold down the L trigger to fire the Scorpion's machine gun while unloading its main cannon with R trigger. There are few things as satisfying as taking out Covenant Ghosts from half a mile away—before they can even get within attacking range of you.



STEALTH CLOAKS ARE YOUR FRIEND

Once you reach a certain point in the game, you must play as the Covenant equivalent of the Master Chief—the Arbiter. While the two play similarly, the Arbiter has one specific advantage over the Master Chief, and that's a stealth camouflage cloak.

Unlike the Covenant Elites and grunts that accompany you, whose technology allows for unlimited usage, the Arbiter's stealth only lasts for about 10 seconds and requires a recharge before you can reapply it. This is great for sneaking up on nearby enemy guards and using a close-range melee move to incapacitate them. Be careful, though, as using any sort of attack or getting hit with any attack causes the field to drop.

Thankfully, even if you're engaged with a foe, if you activate the stealth, your enemies will not be able to track you, which is handy when your shields are down and you're taking heavy fire. This adds a great deal of depth to the game, since you can play covertly or in a full-on assault style.

POWERSLIDE GET!

The trusty Warthog controls much as it did in the first game, for better or worse, only this time Bungie has added a nice powerslide function courtesy of the L trigger. This helps you pivot on a dime and is great for evasive maneuvers. With the increased number of Covenant vehicles—both ground based and airborne—zipping through the game (such as the big dropships that love to fire huge plasma bursts at you), being able to crank out a 90-degree turn is incredibly helpful, if only for keeping your gunners alive. Your men are great conversationalists anyway, so it's worth it to hear their hilarious chatter.





THINK SMART. THINK S-MART

Once you're done beating the single-player story mode, you're going to want to take things online for some seat-of-your-pants thrills. In doing so, you must first create a character profile, where you choose between a Master Chief or Covenant Elite model and customize the color of your body armor and insignia. Whatever you decide on, take our advice: DON'T PICK BRIGHT COLORS. There's nothing players love more than seeing a bright red Master Chief jumping around the multiplayer stages. We suggest muted colors like grays and teals. Bungie specifically omitted the color black because it found it was too easy to lurk in the shadows with an all-black Master Chief.



BUCK BUCK BUCK YA DOWN. BECOME ONE WITH THE SHOTTIE

Later in the game, when you encounter those pesky Flood (did you really think you'd eliminated them?), few weapons will protect you as well as the 8-gauge shotgun. Great for close-range combat, it's perfect for taking out multiple enemies at once. Do yourself a favor and aim for the head.



VOICES IN YOUR HEAD

If you're fortunate enough to have a nice 5.1 surround-sound system (although a receiver with Dolby Pro Logic II will still do rather nicely) or, ideally, a 5.1 headphone system, crank it up. *Halo 2*'s positional sound really gives you a sense of what's lurking around the corner and lets you know if an enemy is approaching from the rear (this is especially useful in later stages that take place in almost complete darkness as you fight against the Flood). While the actual digital audio is stunning (explosions, engines, the clank of footsteps, the awesome soundtrack), it's useful in terms of enhancing the gameplay, too. It also helps to listen for clues that your men give you, as such information is often very useful.



SWORD IN HAND. HAPPY, HAPPY MAN

As can be expected from a weapon with such limited reach, the Covenant energy sword packs a wicked punch. Don't underestimate this useful appliance, as it can disembowel any fool (in single- or multiplayer) daring enough to get close to you. One of the best multiplayer modes is Swords, in which the only available weapons are energy swords and grenades.



TURRETS. WHAT A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

While the temptation to hop on one of the many turrets found in the game (in both campaign mode and multiplayer) is tempting due to their unlimited ammo and rapid rate of fire, remember that doing so makes you blind to an attack from the rear and a sitting duck to attacks from the front. Very few instances in the campaign mode warrant using these turrets (although there are a couple). The best time to use one is when you're playing cooperatively with another player (try the vertical splitscreen, it's great), so someone can cover your back or lay down covering fire.






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A.I.
HIS CODES ARE REAL. BUT HE IS NOT

>>PRIMA DIRECTIVE #1>> Serve the public tips.
>>PRIMA DIRECTIVE #2>> Protect the innocent from Mario and Luigi nude codes.
>>PRIMA DIRECTIVE #3>> Uphold the law that all boss battles involve aiming at giant flashing weak spot on enemy appendage.
>>PRIMA DIRECTIVE #4>> [[CLASSIFIED]]
REBOOTING...
>>PRIMA DIRECTIVE #5>> Connect to Prima mother brain and begin code download.
>>ONLINE

01 X-MEN LEGENDS GC/PS2/XB

>>A.I. Bot deems fleshbag "legends" to be unimpressive species mutation with a predilection for spandex. Suggest fleshbag researchers look into droid "legends."
>>Example: Hal 9000. Example: Kryten. Example: T-800. Example: C-3PO. Error! Please disregard last entry.

Unlock these characters by beating the respective stages.

Colossus	Finish nuclear factory level.
Cyclops	Defeat Mystique.
Emma Frost	Beat nuclear facility level in X-Mansion.
Gambit	Finish third level.
Iceman, Jean Grey, Beast, Rogue, Storm	Finish first level.
Jubilee, Nightcrawler	Finish second level.
Psylocke	Finish NYC riot, Muir Island, and sewer levels.



02 DEF JAM FIGHT FOR NY PS2/XB

>>A.I. Bot already downloaded definition of "jam" from exterior databanks. Construction of giant vat of marionberry distilled sucrose and fruit by-product begins...completed.

Unlock reward points by entering these codes into the Cheat menu.

100 reward points	NEWJACK
100 reward points	THESOURCE
100 reward points	CROOKLYN
100 reward points	DUCKETS
100 reward points	GETSTUFF



03 STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT PS2/XB

>>A.I. Bot is in no way related to Golden Age assassin model HK-47 and in no way is lamely attempting to ride the coattails of said droid. Note the terms "fleshbag" and "meatbag" are almost completely dissimilar. Also note that HK-47 has no "coattails" to speak of, just a sleek body of metal and more amusing vocal capacitors.

Beat specific missions in the historical campaign to unlock the art gallery.

Bespin concept art	Bespin: The Liberation of Cloud City: Galactic Civil War
Endor stills	Bespin: Battle in the Clouds: Galactic Civil War
Unlock all planets	Enter Square, Circle, Square, Circle (PS2) or X, Y, X, Y (XB) during a historical campaign at the planet-selection screen.





04 SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67 PS2/XB

>>A.I. Bot understands fleshbag utilization of crude firearms to be an amusing distraction from the approaching void of eternal nothingness. Suggest fleshbags invest in plastisteel façade to deflect incoming ordnance and a cranial replacement constructed of titanium. Final suggestion: Invest in marker pen to daub fleshbag verbiage, such as "Meat is Murder," on said cranial replacement.

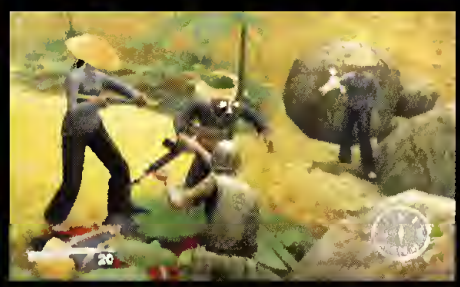
Enter the following at the Title screen to unlock codes.

PS2

God mode	R3, L3, Right, Left, L1, R1, R3, L3, Right, Left, L1, R1

XB

Infinite ammo	Black, R trigger, Y, White, L trigger, Up, Black, R trigger, Y, White, L trigger, Up



05 MADDEN NFL 2005 GC/PS2/XB

>>A.I. Bot understands fleshbag custom involving the wearing of shoulder pads and bellowing at each other. For further elucidation, A.I. Bot is currently downloading all holographic attire of Joan Collins during seasons of primitive '80s entertainment medium *Dynasty*.

Select Madden Cards and enter the following at the Madden Codes section.

Da Bomb: Unlimited passing range.	B61A8M
Da Boot: Unlimited field goal range.	I76X3T
Mistake Free: Can't fumble or throw interceptions.	X78P9Z
Mr. Mobility: Your QB can't get sacked.	Y59R8R
Super Dive: Diving distance increases by 75 percent during the game.	D59K3Y



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06 TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2 GC/PS2/XB

>>A.I. Bot suggests superior mode of transportation to be MK.3 antigravity tank with optional thermonuclear charging capacitors.

Unlock Natas Kaupas	Go into the Cheat menu and enter oldskool. You can then use Natas in classic or free mode.



07 MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION PS2/XB

>>A.I. Bot is encouraged by the evolution of this primitive combative experience, which melds the wanton destruction of unrealistic fleshbag ninjas of different coloration with the excitement of chess. Most impressive.

Unlock the following characters during konquest mode by using the instructions below.

Lui Kang	Find in a treasure chest at point G-8 in Edenia at 12 a.m. Friday behind the tent.
Raiden	Defeat him at point E-3 in Orderrealm after finishing konquest mode.
Kenshi	Find in a treasure chest at point C-3 in Earthrealm.
Tanya	Find in a treasure chest at point A-3 in Outworld between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m.



08 MARIO PINBALL LAND GBA

>>A.I. Bot understands that this character is an overweight mustachioed middle-aged man clad in dungarees with an insatiable appetite for young princesses and narcotic mushrooms. Suggest ESRB investigation immediately.

Unlock time attack	Beat two bosses from any of the five worlds.



09 BLOODRAYNE 2 PS2/XB

>>A.I. Bot is most impressed at the additional minifleshbags attached to the frontal torso of this female fleshbag. However, he anticipates that no one from this company's marketing department would cheapen this character's image.

Go in the Cheats section in the Extras menu and enter these passwords:

Enable all powers	Blank Ugly Pustule Eater
God mode	Uber Taint Joad Durf Kwis
Unlimited ammo	Ugly Dark Heated Orange Quaff
Unlock outfits	Whack Lick Erotic Cunningly



10 SLY 2: BAND OF THIEVES PS2

>>A.I. Bot once played the Hammond organ in an electronic ensemble that included IG-88, Robbie, and Gary Numan. Are friends electric? Not A.I. Bot: A central nuclear core powers this mechanoid.

Unlock the time rush gadget	Pause the game by pressing Start, then enter Down, Down, Up, Down, Right, Left.



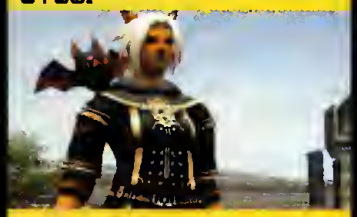
Time Rush: Live the fast life while you speed up the clock. Press and hold [L1] to use.



MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TAAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOA'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

GYOGI



THIEF/NINJA

MAIN JOB LEVEL 32
SUBJOB LEVEL 16
NATION: WINDURST
RACE: MITHRA
SERVER: SIREN
LINKSHELL: RDUNDABDUTS



Kikai rocking the Pumpkin Head II

What a busy month! And it's all about the ladies. Sure, Milkman stayed busy, grabbing a shaman's cloak off of Centurio X-I in the Quicksand Caves, leveling his Black Mage job (and learning Warp), and moving his Red Mage up a notch or two, but that's kid stuff. This month's spotlight belongs to Gyogi and Kikai, the THF/NIN and WAR/MNK, respectively, who have spent the past few weeks leveling up.

Gyogi (Japanese for "behavior"), for a level 30 Mithra, has nearly as much fame as Milkman in the three nations. While not quite Hero level, she's getting there. After a few hours in the Maze of Shakhrami, she got her Ninja subjob up to level 16, which supports her Thief main at 32. The best part is she now has Utsusemi, which creates shadow images for enemies to flail at, while she pounds away at them with her parrying knife and Mithran scimitar. Since the effectiveness of a Thief's SATA move (Sneak Attack, Trick Attack) is reliant on dexterity, I pimped her out in the best Dex-enhancing gear I could get my hands on. She has an emperor hairpin (Dex+3, Agi+3, Evasion+10), a spike necklace (Str+3, Dex+3), a balance ring (Dex+2), winged boots (Dex+3, Agi+3), and some noct hose+1 (which adds Dex+2). Her Mithran scimitar also adds Dex+3, which brings her grand Dexterity total—at the modest THF level of 32—to 64 (including equipment). The end result of all this tweaking is that when she pulls off a SATA on some unsuspecting mob, the mob gets hurrrrrt. A high Dex rating also helps the Thief Steal job ability, and a nice stack of silver beastcoins helps keep Gyogi supplied with the Shihei powder required to use Utsusemi. With the help of Flannelman (DRK), Jeru (WHM), Honna (DRG), Alderon (RDM), and others, Gyogi also collected all four pieces of her Mithran race-specific equipment. These folks and others, like the ever-present Wraeth, accompanied Gyogi on her advanced job quests for Samurai and Dragoon. While she will no doubt stick with the THF/NIN combo into her 70s, it's always nice to have other jobs to dabble in when leveling becomes a grind.

My Warrior, Kikai (Japanese for "machine"), had been languishing on the fringes of a chocobo license for way too long, so I formed a small party and went into the maze. Well, she entered at level 18 and came out at level 20. But it didn't stop there. The party (comprised mostly of Roundabouts leveling lower-level jobs) was so effective that they decided to move to Quifim and fight crabs and worms. That proved such a success that everyone kept going right on into Lower Delkfutt's Tower, charging through dozens of goblins and bringing Kikai's Warrior job up to level 25, gaining her the abilities Berserk and Defender in the process. With her Monk subjob, Kikai also gained the job trait "Counter," which occasionally gives Warriors an extra attack while blocking an enemy's advance. This comes in handy when she's using larger weapons (great swords, great axes, scythes) with big delays between swings. Since those weapons also prevent the use of a shield, any extra defense helps. Since her ultimate destiny is to march through Vana'diel as an übertank, in particular a Paladin, I'm keeping her weapon skills maxed in nearly every category. This way she'll be versatile enough to contribute to skillchains in practically any group configuration she finds herself in.

This month also marked the first anniversary of the Roundabouts, the linkshell Lyonheart and I started a year ago. Thanks for following our adventures, and please look forward to our continuing efforts.

_James Mielke







→ Above, Gyogi uses Tonko: Ichi to render herself invisible to aggressive mobs. At left, Kitty and assorted Roundies kill the NM treant needed to complete her Samurai quest. Right, Kikai uses her new chocobo license to bolt across the plains of Vana'diel, grabbing teleport gate crystals and the keys to Kazham. Chirp!



Welcome to Yuhtunga Jungle, and the Roundabouts' cliffside barbeque!



→ Above, the Roundabouts pose for the camera, celebrating their first anniversary in the lush, quiet, and scenic setting of Yuhtunga Jungle. Meat chiefkabobs and Yagudo drinks were served after. Milkman and Lyonheart (left) reminisce about the days when the Roundabouts consisted of only the pair of them. Below, Milkman reunites with Eieva, alongside whom he fought ghouls in the Valkurm Dunes for a magicked skull (one of the key items needed for a subjob) almost a year ago to the day. It's always fun to see the veterans on active duty.







→ Top, Milkman organizes the troops for the group pic while waiting for the fog to clear. Bottom, the Roundabouts' resident munchkins take their positions up front in preparation for the big shoot.

It's been a year since Milkman and Eieva got their subjobs

KICKIN' IT LIVE, 1-TIME!

On October 30, 2004, Square Enix hosted a Halloween party in San Francisco to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the North American launch of *Final Fantasy XI*. Over 500 people wearing all manner of *Final Fantasy*–related costumes (Red Mages were the most prevalent. Word.) packed Jillian's nightclub, as none other than the Milkman rocked the house with an eclectic blend of thumping breakbeats mixed with familiar songs from Square's library of games ("Dash De Chocobo" from *FFXI*, Utada Hikaru's "Hikari" from *Kingdom Hearts*, and "Eyes On Me" from *FFVIII* were among the highlights). Attendees participated in special Ballista matches, while the top 10 cosplayers vied for the event's top prize—a pimped-out Voodoo gaming PC. Everyone left a winner though, as generous gift bags were handed out at the end of the four-hour event. Thanks, everyone!









Good kitty

ATHLETIC SUPPORT



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SPORTS GAMING

MX VS. ATV UNLEASHED UNLEASHED

RAINBOW CREATING BATTLE OF THE OFF-RODS

NEWS

Last year's *MX Unleashed*, developed by Rainbow Studios and published by THQ, had gamers speeding through massive environments, competing in freestyle showdowns, and experiencing bone-crushing collisions. *MX vs. ATV Unleashed* ups the ante, taking two prominent off-road vehicles head-to-head, along with monster trucks, dune buggies, and even biplanes. Having developed the first two *ATV Offroad Fury* games for Sony, Rainbow is right at home on four wheels. *MX vs. ATV* features an expanded career mode and includes plenty more tricks; online play is promised. *MX vs. ATV* will be unleashed on PS2 and Xbox in February 2005.





FIFA GOIN' ALL STREET

ER ADDS SOCCER TO STREET SERIES

NEWS

Following the success of its NFL and NBA *Street* games, EA Sports is bringing soccer superstars and an arcade style together in *FIFA Street*. Casting simulation aside, *FIFA Street* opts for 4-on-4 play with a focus on head-to-head encounters. To do this, players will need to utilize a bevy of freestyle moves either to shake defenders or get their feet on the ball themselves. Watch for *FIFA Street* sometime in 2005 for PS2 and Xbox.

5 UP, 5 DOWN: HOCKEY

GMR pucks around with the five best and the five worst hockey games of all time.

5 UP

NHL HITZ 2003 (MIDWAY, PS2)
Midway perfects arcade hockey before getting too serious with *Hitz Pro*.



ESPN NHL 2005 (SEGA, XB)
Bargain price, great franchise mode, and online leagues.

NHLPA HOCKEY '93 (EA SPORTS, GENESIS)
May go down as one of history's greatest sports games.

ICE HOCKEY (NINTENDO, NES)
Fat guy? Skinny guy? This 8-bit classic's got it all!

ICE HOCKEY (ACTIVISION, ATARI 2600)
Slick old-school action. Unlike the Intellivision rival, this game had actual A.I.

5 DOWN

MARIO LEMIEUX HOCKEY (SEGA, GENESIS)
Maybe Sega made this game awful on purpose to besmirch the name "Mario."



NHL RIVALS 2004 (MICROSOFT, XB)
Bad enough to help force Microsoft to close its sports division.

NHL FACEOFF 2001 (SONY, PS2)
Oops! Sony accidentally released a PS1 hockey game as a PS2 game.

BLADES OF STEEL '99 (KONAMI, N64)
The most disappointing sequel since *Blues Brothers 2000*.

OLYMPIC HOCKEY (MIDWAY, N64)
Midway shamelessly milks the decent *Wayne Gretzky 3D* with a no-name clone.

COURTROOM RUMBLE

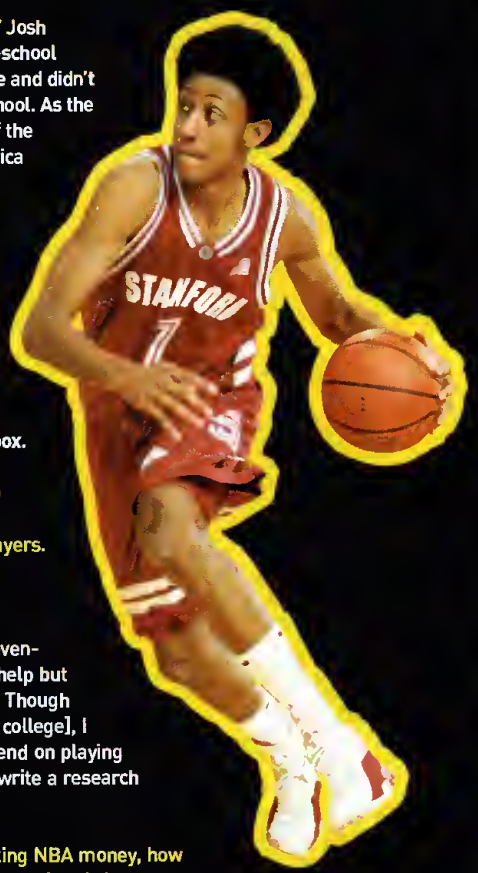
World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) has filed a lawsuit against both Jakks Pacific and THQ, claiming Jakks bribed WWE's outside licensing agent in order to receive highly sought after WWE licenses for toys and videogames. THQ was named in the suit due to having formed a joint venture with Jakks to publish WWE games after the Acclaim license expired.

According to the complaint, WWE's licensing agency withheld vital information from the wrestling organization. WWE said Acclaim was told by the agency that the game license would not be renewed. Additionally, apparent offers from both THQ and Activision were never revealed to WWE. Instead, the agency—due to what the suit claims were several high-priced bribes—recommended the license be awarded to Jakks Pacific, a company that at the time had no way of developing videogames and is best known for repackaging old Atari and Namco titles. Eventually, Jakks formed a joint venture with THQ to make the games.

Both THQ and Jakks deny any wrongdoing. In a statement, Jakks says it looks forward to legal vindication. Meanwhile, THQ wants to make clear that the accusations are directed at Jakks. WWE seeks to make the license (set to run through 2009) null and void. WWE also said it would be unfair for the companies to keep the money earned through the license, which means big potential losses for Jakks and THQ.

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GMR ASKS: JOSH CHILDRESS



The Atlanta Hawks' Josh Childress is an old-school rookie. He isn't from Europe and didn't come straight from high school. As the 2003-2004 Pac-10 Player of the Year and multiple All-America honoree, Stanford grad Childress established a stellar college career before moving on to the NBA. He's also the cover athlete for *ESPN College Hoops 2005*. *GMR* sat down with the 6-foot-8-inch hoopster to talk games, both on the court and on Xbox.

GMR: As a pro, you have to play more games against bigger, stronger, better players. How have you prepared yourself?

JOSH CHILDRESS: It's a seven-day-a-week job; you can't help but get fit and in top condition. Though it's more demanding [than college], I have a lot more time to spend on playing basketball. I don't have to write a research paper or go to class.

GMR: Now that you're making NBA money, how has that affected your gaming lifestyle?

JC: I got myself a nice big plasma screen that I can play games on. I play *ESPN NBA 2K5*. I also play a lot of *Halo*; I reserved *Halo 2* a while ago. A few of my teammates and friends and other players plan to go online and play each other.

GMR: Is there a lot of trash-talking when NBA players play videogames?

JC: Oh my God. It's worse than on the court. When we get together, it's ridiculous.

GMR: Are the guys that talk the most trash the best players?

JC: I kick their butts every time. I talk trash, too, but I kick their butts all the time.

GMR: How did you feel the first time you saw yourself in a game? Did they capture you accurately?

JC: I was so excited. I feel I'm pretty good in most of the games. I did want my 'fro bigger, though. That's not a big deal, though, as long as they got my game right.

GMR: With so many guys sporting 'fros, games can't just have one 'fro model. Yours has to be different from Moochie Norris' and Ben Wallace's.

JC: Our 'fros are all different. Ben has the blow-out 'fro. It's a little more wild than mine. Mine's kind of tame.

GMR: Is that on purpose, to make you more aerodynamic?

JC: [*Laughs*] Naw, my mom would kick my butt if I did that.

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GAME GEEZER

HE'S OLD! HE'S PISSED!

THE GREATEST GAME OF ALL TIME?

"Hey, Mr. Geezer, could you help us out here? We're confused."

Is that a fact? Well, ya sure fooled me. You don't look confused. Just stupid!

Try breathing with your mouths closed sometime—your brains get more oxygen that way! Now git!

"Wait, Mr. Geezer—please—just one question. It's about game magazines, sir. See, we've got the latest issues of all the different magazines, and now we can't figure out which is the greatest game of all time—*Halo 2*, *Half-Life 2*, or *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*?"

Eh?

"You know—the greatest game of all time? Is it *Halo 2*, *Half-Life 2*, or *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*? We know it must be one of those games because we've got all these magazine reviews here and that's what they're all saying. Except they don't all pick the same game. So which one is it?"

Well, now just hold yer horses here. Siddown. Pay attention. And get yer fingers out of your nostrils while I'm talkin'—whatever ya got in there can wait until later. OK, now listen up. I'm sure these games are all good. Great, even. One of 'em might in fact be the best game of 2004. I couldn't tell ya for sure, though, because the year ain't over and I haven't even played *Catwoman* yet. And maybe one of those games will turn out, in time, to be one of the all-time greats, but who the hell knows already?

Things need time to settle, to find their place in the scheme of things. Take Mrs. Geezer over there, for example. Now, the night I met her, she was a real knockout. I mighta told you she was the most beautiful woman in the whole world that night, just like these overeager game reviewers here say about new games. Now, granted, I had had about four beers already and was blind as a mole. Plus I hadn't been with a woman, not a real one anyway, in a good long stretch. That first night, I was ready for some serious lovin'! And I got it! And I loved it! But the next morning, however—good lord! Lemme tell you boys: It was like waking up next to Keith Richards. Before the blood transfusion!



Ya get what I'm sayin' here? Sometimes I think they staff these here magazines with a bunch of 5-year-olds, the way everybody gets all overexcited all the time. Every cool new game that comes out doesn't have to be the greatest thing ever, and it can still be great. Calm the hell down! I know it's a privilege to get to play these games before everyone else does, but that doesn't mean you need to drool all over your keyboards about it without taking any time to think.

The fact of the matter is, you probably only played these new games one time—maybe not even all the way through—so the truth is that you barely know what yer talkin' about. Nor have you had the time or perspective yet to figure out how they fit into the bigger scheme of things! Are these games really better than, say, *Tetris*? Are you really going to be playing *Halo 2* 20 years from now, too? Yeah, that's right, hard to tell yet. So you might as well pull your pants up, stop hyperventilating, and take the hyperbole down a couple thousand notches, OK? We'll believe you that it's good even without you frothing at the mouth about it.

Now, go on—get outta here! I got me here what is without a doubt the greatest game of all time, so I don't wanna waste any more time with you morons! *Katamari Damacy*, here I come!

I THINK THEY STAFF THESE HERE MAGAZINES WITH 5-YEAR-OLDS.

The views expressed by Game Geezer are his own and do not necessarily reflect the views of *GMR*.









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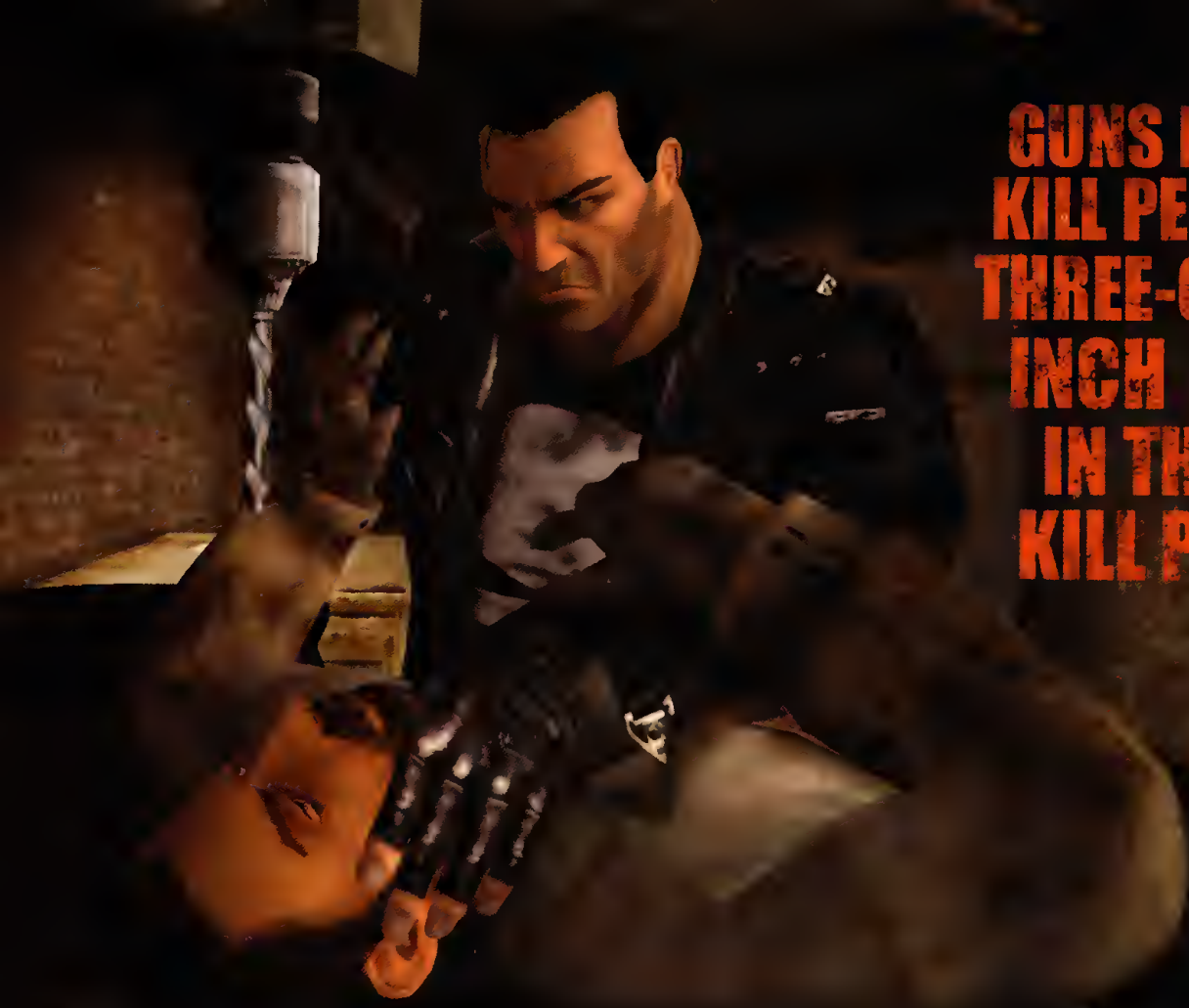
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